

Doctor of Ministry Project

Kava: Toward a Constructive Theology of Sacrifice for
the Tongan Church-Community.

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ABSTRACT

Called to be Multicultural:

New Testament and Religious Education Perspectives to Develop Multicultural Churches

by

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This project deals with the problem that some United Methodist Churches in multicultural neighborhoods in Southern California are remaining mono-cultural while the neighborhoods around them are becoming increasingly multicultural. This leaves the Church as the sole segregated institution in a community, which is contrary to the theological heritage of the New Testament. This ethic of ministry sends an implicit message that the Church can never be the center of the community. This message is devastating to communities that desperately need a common ground and devastating to the Church in areas of the country, like Southern California, which are growing more and more multicultural. Construction of the Church in this way has rendered the Church to the boundary of these neighborhoods rather than to the center of the neighborhood where it is called to be. The Church becomes an institution that separates and divides the community and eventually will become obsolete in this setting.

This project relies heavily on a liberation theology model of praxis for developing perspectives that can be employed in the development of a multicultural Church. The first movement of the perspective is exegesis. There are three levels of exegesis, or understandings, to be gained: biblical/theological, about the Church itself, and about the community. These understandings build the foundation upon which the multicultural

Church will be developed. The second movement of the perspective is reflection.

Critical reflection is applied to all three levels of exegesis, developing a mass of critical understanding of self and community from which to act. The third movement of the perspective is action. As in liberation theology, praxis is a combination of reflection and action, and this project demonstrates how the first two movements can lead to transformative action within the Church.

These movements of religious education give a perspective through which to view the biblical proclamation, ourselves and our communities. This perspective allows for us to re-vision the ministry of the Church in such a way that individual diversity can be celebrated and at the same time the Church can be the center of any community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	
Statement of the Problem	1
Importance of the Problem	1
Thesis.....	8
Definition of Major Terms	10
Work Previously Done in the Field	10
Scope and Limitations of the Project	15
Procedure for Integration	16
Chapter Outlines	18
2. A HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	20
The Tongan Context.....	20
The Political Structure of the Tongan Society.....	20
The Social Structure of the Tongan Society.....	22
Missionaries in Tonga.....	25
Theology of the Missionaries.....	28
The American Context.....	29
The Church.....	29
The Members.....	31
3. <i>KAVA</i>	39
Myth and Legend of <i>Kava'onau</i>	39
Types of <i>Kava</i> Ceremonies	42
<i>Tau Fakalokua</i>	42
<i>Faikava 'Eva</i>	43
Formal <i>Kava</i> Ceremonies	43
<i>Taumafa Kava</i>	43
<i>'Ilo Kava</i>	44
<i>Kava Faka-Siasi</i>	45
<i>Kalapu Kava Tonga</i>	46
<i>Kava</i> as a Symbol of <i>Fonua</i> (The Land, The People)	48
4. SACRIFICE	51
Definition and Components of Sacrifice	51
Biblical Study of Sacrifice	53
Sacrifice in the Old Testament	55
Sacrifice in the New Testament	57
Sacrifice from the Tongan Perspective	58
5. SEARCH FOR A THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY.....	63
Critique of the Tongan-Western Theology	63
Contextualization	66
Contextualization in the Pacific	69
Coconut Theology	70

	The Theology of the <i>Maneba</i>	71
	A Contextual Theology of <i>Vanua</i> or Land	72
	Weavers-the Pacific Versions of Feminist Theology.....	73
	Other Theological Works in Progress	74
	Theology of Sacrifice as Contextual Theology from the Margin	75
	Theology of Sacrifice Sources for Theological Construction	75
	A Personal Reflection	76
	The Life Experiences of Tongan People in America	82
	The Context that Gave Rise to these Experiences	85
	Va`ava`a he ko e Tangata: Relational Context	86
	Scripture	88
	Methodology for Theology of Sacrifice	89
6.	TOWARD A CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY OF SACRIFICE FOR THE TONGAN CHURCH-COMMUNITY	96
	The Theology of Kava as a Sacrifice	96
	Systematic Analysis of the Standard <i>Loci</i> of the Theology of Sacrifice	97
	Doctrine of God	97
	Christology: Christ Centered Identity	103
	Eucharist and Kava	106
	The Concept of Sin	108
	Ecclesiology	110
	Pneumatology	112
	Eschatology	113
	Theology of Kava as a Sacrifice: A Critique	114
7.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	117
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	119

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Addressed by the Project

The people of the South Pacific islands of Tonga have long valued their Christian faith and belief. Many have left the islands in search of better living circumstances and they have taken with them their one enduring *koloa* or value, their faith. As the Tongan people of the United Methodist Church (UMC) attempts to become viable members of the United Methodist multicultural faith communities in America, it is essential that they construct a theology that appropriately expresses their context, experiences, identity, culture and traditions. The current theology used by the Tongan Churches in the United States of America is the same transplanted Euro-centric theology brought to Tonga by the European missionaries in the late 19th century. Naturally, that theology fails to accurately embody the life and living of the Tongan people and how they relate and respond to God.

Importance of the Problem

Religion is central in the life of the Tongan people. King George Tupou I, father of modern-day Tonga, dedicated Tonga to God and proclaimed Tonga's motto as "God and Tonga are my inheritance." Every Tongan has ever since proudly and fervently claimed this ideal. As a result, Tonga has historically been a Christian nation. The people's devotion to God and the Church is not limited to life in Tonga only. It is

apparent that everywhere Tongans settled, they have started a church fellowship of some sort.

The Tongan United Methodist Church (TUMC) in the United States maintains a strong connection with the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga or the Methodist Church of Tonga. This is not surprising since about 90 percent or more of the adults in the TUMCs are first generation immigrants from Tonga. In addition, all the pastors of the twenty-six TUMCs in the California Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church are also first generation Tongan immigrants. There has yet to be a clergy that was born and raised in this country.

This strong connection can be seen in the program life of the church. The TUMCs in the United States are transplants of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. The programs and the books used by the churches here are brought from Tonga. The hymnals and bibles are the same ones translated by missionaries with the help of a few Tongans in the early twentieth century. Given such an intimate connection, it is not surprising that the theology in the churches in the United States is still the same one that is prevalent in the churches in Tonga.

Consistent with the practice of transplanting the Tongan Free Wesleyan church methodology and resources, the UMC Tongan churches have continued to nourish the Euro-centric theology that is prevalent in Tonga. While this theology may seem appropriate in its tendency to appease the Tongan immigrants' longing for their homeland, it is

inadequate to accurately reflect the reality of the Tongan immigrants' life in this new context and environment here in the United States.

Such a theology is based on the Western colonizers' attitudes and sensibilities of having the dominant and normative theology. Consistent with this sense of superiority, the proponent of this theology viewed the Tongans as "heathens" and in need of renewal.¹ This Western theology effectively created a sense of inferiority among the Tongan folks as their ways of doing things were seen as inferior to the European missionaries' ways. Much of the missionaries' works consisted of destroying the Tongan traditional gods and ways of doing things or changing the way things were done in Tonga. The Bible was taught as the ultimate truth and it was considered un-Christian to be questioned. Consequently, we see a transmission of a conformist theology among the Tongans.

The influence of the missionaries in the life of the Tongans was tremendous and remained long after the last missionaries left the islands. Such lasting influence has remained in the life of the Tongans to this day and even in the migration to other countries, these influences are still prevalent. In the migration process to the United States, the Tongans have brought with them the same attitude of psychological inferiority and lack of critical reflection about theology.

Life within the Tongan communities in America contains much the same struggles and challenges as those seen in any other immigrant society. The difficult and universal process of transition is characterized

United States, the Tongan people consistently live out a life of sacrifice through giving and sharing. This defining character of giving sacrificially is the same characteristic that triggered the sacrifice in the original Kava myth. And, today, thousands of years later, and in foreign soil, this ethic of sacrificing one's good and needs for the benefit of others is still the prevailing act that defines the Tongan people. And it is no accident that here in America this act of giving happens primarily within the context of a kava circle. Indeed, it is out of this context of sacrificial living that we can create a theology that appropriately embodies the life and living of the Tongan people. Using the story and the practice of the Kava as a milieu, the theology of sacrifice will provide the Tongan people with a more appropriate tool for living out their faith and for living in this new surrounding.

Constructing a new theology of sacrifice will have several advantageous effects for the Tongan community of faith. Firstly, it will have the effect of returning to the Tongan people that which was taken from them in the name of "Christianity" when the missionaries effectively destroyed and changed so much of their native context in order to ensure their conformity. It is my hope that Tongans can reclaim their identity by allowing room for critical reflection and dialogue regarding the use and practice of *kava* in creating a theology that speaks of their struggles and experiences in this country. This project will use the study of *kava* as a vehicle to reclaim a Christian theology that uplifts and appropriately defines the totality of Tongan life and context. The Tongan people will be

able to validate their traditional practices and articulate their process of responding and relating to God from within those practices.

Secondly, a new theology will be a tool of great empowerment for the Tongan people. The existing value system in this capitalist world of consumerism defines well-being and prosperity by how much one acquires and hoards goods and wealth. Reconstructing the Tongan people's theological disposition will necessarily entail a shifting of paradigm that will bring forth an alternative value system in which the Tongan traditional values of sacrificial giving and living will become the new standard for prosperity. The Tongan people have long valued and thrived on the rewards of living a life of sacrifice, but that value has been a lesser source of satisfaction and gratification, inferior to the state of prosperity and abundance defined by consumerism and capitalism.

Theologizing about the practice of kava is necessary and timely. In validating this practice for what it is, Tongan theologians will effectively remove it from the sphere of outsiders, who may incorrectly appropriate and label it as something other than what it is. Ultimately, if we don't do it, someone else would do it, and without the appropriate contextual understanding, this very profound practice will be misinterpreted and mislabeled.

In 1999, the California Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, through its Cabinet, moved to inquire about the legitimacy of this practice and its proper place in the church. Admittedly, this action was deemed necessary at the time, due to some

discrepancies in one local church regarding the use of kava in its facility. At that point, some of us in the Tongan congregations of the United Methodist Church responded to the Conference by presenting an opinion paper that appropriately contextualized the use of kava in Tonga and here in the United States. This is an on-going dialogue, and one that is necessitated by our diversity and our common journey as a people of “one faith,” (Ephesians 4:5). Again, if Tongans do not engage themselves in the process of contextualizing, the dominant members of this society will step in to decipher something that is completely foreign to them, and the effect will be detrimental.

Finally, reconstructing a Tongan theology that is based on the unique context of the Tongan life is a fundamental process for the Tongan people’s Christian journey. It is essential that they identify with the Christian story, and that identity must be that of a Tongan personhood relating to Christ. *“Christianity was meant to build on our cultures and national traditions. The kava ceremony can help us in Tonga to understand and appreciate better the Mass as a sacrifice and as a meal.”*² The late Bishop Patelesio Finau, of the Catholic Church of Tonga, offered these inspirational words during a speech entitled, “View of the Church in the Future of the Pacific” at a consultation on theological education in the Pacific held in Western Samoa in 1978. I have been more than inspired by these words. This project draws its

² Bishop Patelesio Finau, “View of the Church in the Future of the Pacific,” in Mullins, David W., ed. Bishop Patelesio Finau s.m. of Tonga, He Spoke the Truth in Love, (Auckland: Catholic Publications Centre, 1994), 34.

motivation and strength from such a visionary. I hope that this work would in some small way contribute to such a vision.

Thesis

This project will consider the traditional and contemporary Tongan custom of Kava in constructing an authentic Tongan theology of sacrifice that can provide an appropriate model for understanding God using the life experiences and practices of the Tongans and thereby empowering the Tongan people to validate their traditional notion of communal living which fosters the ideal and practice of sacrificial living and ultimately, a life of abundance living in Christ.

Definition of Major Terms

Constructive Theology: It is the building of a new theology employing the power of human imagination. It is the work of seeking a deeper and clearer articulation of Christian faith using one's immediate context.

Fonua: Land or another name for the *kava* plant and its use. This term is also used to refer, generally, to the traditions and culture of the land. A common phrase by any group of men drinking *kava* in Tonga or the United States of America is "*pukepuke fonua*", translated as "we are upholding the traditions of the land."

Church-Community: The separate definitions of church and community are well understood. I use this term in the title of this project to point to the dialectic roles of the Tongan church in the United States. The church is a place of spiritual growth as well as a center of the Tongan community in this country. These dialectic roles of the church in

this country make it an apt substitution for both the church and the villages in Tonga.

Immigrants: A Tongan person who has come to the United States, a foreign country, to live permanently.

Kava: *Kava* is the term used for both the plant and the beverage made from it. In this project, the term will be used to describe a central ritual and practice in the life of the Tonga. The plant comes from the pepper family. Botannically, it is called *Piper methysticum*. The *kava* plant is found in the various islands of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. In this project the term will be used more broadly to include a ceremony, a social gathering or a meeting in which *kava* is served. It is known throughout the Pacific islands by various names such as *awa* in Hawaii, *ava* in Samoa, *yagona* in Fiji. The preparation of the drink involves grinding or pounding the dried roots of the *kava* plant into powder and mixing it with water. The beverage is then drunk among the men of the villages in Tonga as well as other South Pacific islands. It should be noted that the *kava* ceremonies have also changed over the years in various Pacific Islands to include women in this ritual. *Kava* has also been imported by pharmaceutical companies in America and Europe to produce dietary supplements in the forms of pills, tincture, and herbs. These products come in different names such as *Kava-Kava*, *Kava Kauai*, *Kavatrol*, to name a few and they claim to relieve insomnia and anxiety among other ailments.

Sacrificial-Sharing: It is the term I use to describe the practice of giving and sharing seen among the Tongans in their society and their churches. This is my way of describing the act of sacrificial giving by people who are at the lowest end of the economic ladder.

Tongan United Methodist Church (TUMC): This term in this paper refers to any UMC congregation, ministry, or fellowship that has a worship service and carries out its functions in the Tongan language. Although the characteristics may be similar, in some cases I will use this term interchangeably between the churches in Tonga as well as in the US.

Work Previously Done in the Field

Tongans have written very little in the field of Theology. I share this sentiment with Tongan scholars and theologians alike. This does not mean that there has been no theology operating in Tonga for the last century. Theorizing and theologizing has remained for the most part in the oral traditions in Tonga. There have been very few writers in this field who have put their work in a published or written format. For the Tongans, our struggles with Euro-centric Christianity as well as the multicultural society of America have to be given a voice and a context. Although, existing contextual writings from Asian, African American, Hispanic and other perspectives contributing to the multicultural dialogue they are inadequate to address the Tongan situation. Specifically, I am concerned with the cultural aspects of Tongan life in the United States of America.

I am grateful for the written works of the following Tongan theologians who I will use as primary sources upon which some of my arguments will be built.

Most recently, Siotame Havea, as a part of his doctoral dissertation in 2001 at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, produced a theological work entitled “*A theological Perspective on Ethics, Sacrifice and Unity in a Tongan Context.*” Havea proposed that “the act of freely chosen sacrifices initiates and preserves unity.”³ He argues that the concept of self-sacrifice highlights the relationship between sacrifice and unity, and the value of achieving unity within the Tongan context.

The late Sione ‘Amanaki Havea proposed to the first Evangelical Consultation on Pacific Theology in Papua New Guinea in 1986 that Pacific Islanders should use the regional elements of their culture and traditions to express theology that is universal. S.A. Havea encouraged the Pacific Islanders to “pick up their pens” and participate in writing a theology that articulates the Pacific Island contexts. As an example, he referred to how Jesus, who was born a Jew in a Hebrew context, employed the elements of his context to illustrate his teachings. S. A. Havea called on the Tongans to use legends of *Kava* for the development of a theology on death and resurrection as well as the events on the cross. Additionally, the Coconut plants provide symbolism for a theology

³ Siotame Havea, “A Theological Perspective on Ethics, Sacrifice and Unity in a Tongan Context” (Ph.D. diss., University of Auckland, 2001), 1.

of the Eucharist.⁴ Havea produced one of the Pacific regions' early work in contextual theology, the *coconut theology*.

Likewise, Tevita Tonga Mokenoa Puloka's Doctorate of Ministry project at Claremont School of Theology, "*An Attempt at Contextualization Theology for the Tongan Church*" articulated the need for the Tongan churches to contextualize their theology in order to cope with their rapidly changing environment. Although Puloka's writing was geared toward the church in Tonga, it still provided a framework for this project, as the churches in the United States are transplants of the Free Wesleyan Churches in Tonga. Puloka pointed out the lack of written work in theology as a whole in Tonga due to the late availability of the printing press.⁵

Mikaele Paunga, SM, a systematic theology professor at the Pacific Regional Seminary in Fiji provided an overview of the various works on contextual theology in the Pacific region. These works will be discussed in Chapter 5.

This project will also draw from several fields: Constructive theology, Biblical Studies, worship and homiletics and the works written about *kava*. The works of Eleazar S. Fernandez in *Towards a Theology of Struggle* is instrumental in providing the necessary framework on how to develop a constructive theology. Fernandez insists on making theology

⁴ Sione Amanaki Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context," in *South Pacific Theology*, ed. Regnum Books and World Vision International South Pacific (Paranattam N.S.W: Regnum Books and World Vision International South Pacific, 1987), 14.

contextual in order for liberation to take place. His work provided a perspective that has been ignored for a long time from the dominant western theologians. His courage in voicing the struggles of the Filipino people is both an inspiration and a guide for this project. The works on Latin American Liberation theology will give a framework for the search for a theological methodology. The works of Gustavo Gutierrez, Robert McAfee Brown will be employed in designing the theological method of this paper. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki's book, *God Christ Church*, provided *process* guidance for the development of a theology of sacrifice.

In biblical studies, the theology of culture, rituals and practices of the people in the Old and New Testaments help to clarify the basic concept that theology occurs within a context. The stories of the life of the Israelites and how they relate to God while on the way to the Promised Land are stories about their rituals and cultural practices. In their daily lives, the Jews participated in sacrifices as part of the normal routine of their society. As we move to the four Gospels of the New Testament we are provided with the story of Jesus who lived and taught out of the context of his day. The Epistles are grounded in Jesus as the "Crucified" and Jesus as the "Risen Lord." The life of Jesus gives us the ultimate story of sacrifice which is to give one's life for others or self-denial. This is the highest goal of Christian living.

⁶ Tevita T.M. Puloka, "An Attempt on Contextualizing Theology for the Tongan Church" in South Pacific Theology, ed. Regnum Books and World Vision International South Pacific (Paranattam N.S.W: Regnum Books and World Vision International South Pacific, 1987), 1.

In the use and practices of *kava*, there are some studies that have been done. The Journal of Polynesian Society contains several articles on *Kava* from missionaries in the South Pacific and research using modern technology. Along this line, the Tongan Government Education Syllabus department has done research and written about the origin of *Kava* from legends and folklore to the modern practices in Tonga. Professor 'Okusitino Mahina of the Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand is one of the leading scholars in Tongan mythology, folklore and anthropology. His work on the myth of *Kava'onau* provides valuable insights into the pre-Christian era of Tonga as well as its socio-political system.

Additionally, I. Futa Helu, founder of Tonga's 'Atenisi Institute and University, described the various types of *kava* ceremonies and their symbolic value in the Tongan society in his book, *Critical Essays: Cultural Perspectives from the South Seas*. These works will shed light on the history and relevance of the *kava* ceremonies in the Tongan society as a whole. In 1972, J. S. La Fontaine edited a book entitled *The Interpretation of Ritual* that offered works on "Psychoanalysis and Ceremony," as well as on the "Structure and Symbolism" of *kava*. These works paint the picture of *kava* as being more than a drink or a ceremony. *Kava* points to something beyond itself.

The works that have been done on *Kava* have helped those who are unfamiliar with this drink and practice. However, these writings have not adequately addressed the theological issues concerning the place of

Kava in the church. Furthermore, the centrality of *kava* in the Tongan life makes it a sufficient tool for empowerment for Tongans in constructing a theology that addresses their culture, experiences and daily struggles. Such a theology will validate one of the central practices within the Tongan society.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

This project will be limited to Tongan United Methodist churches of Southern California. However, some of the ideas discussed in this project hold true in almost any Tongan United Methodist Church and Tongans in other denominations in this country. Having been a part the TUMC churches in Southern California for almost twenty-five years, first as a member, and now as a leader, I draw my observations, information, and conclusion primarily from my experiences with this group. As a member and now a pastor, I have had the opportunity of working among the members and living out the daily experience of a life of sacrifice and communal living. In addition, I have had the opportunity of being in the *kava* ceremonies at all of these churches. Finally, sources for this project include the life experiences and the faith journey of those in the Tolutasi Pacific Islanders UMC where I have been the pastor since July 1st, 2003.

I am aware that this work is at its infancy stage. I do not make the claim that this is a panacea for all-theological perspectives and queries of the Tongan contexts. As a Tongan immigrant to this country I pursue this venture in order to give voice to the journey that I have taken along

with other fellow co-journeyers from this small South Sea Island. This work is simply our theological reflections on how we have understood God in various stages of this journey.

Procedure for Integration

This project will integrate approaches drawn from theology, biblical studies and hermeneutics to provide a theological framework for the Tongan church in the United States. The prior works written on the subject will be employed to construct the theology of sacrifice for these church-communities. The project will focus on the incompatible relationship between the present Euro-Centric theology and the current theological state of the Tongan people's lives. The need for a new theology that can better reflect the life of the Tongan is directly related to the Tongan church's inability to live out some of its expected callings in its new surrounding. Taking the *kava* in all of its cultural applications, I will show how the culture and tradition can help draw people to a clearer understanding of God and be empowered in the process where they are given a voice. Having considered and appreciated the values of our cultural practice, we then can use such rituals as *kava* as our contribution in the dialogue and practice of ministry in this multicultural society.

This project will be accomplished through several tasks. First, a library research will be done to review the body of written works regarding the practices of *kava*, constructive theology, and biblical

studies relating to sacrifice. Secondly, I will employ the Tongan oral tradition in the *Kava* circles and conversations with Tongan elders to flesh out some of my ideas or to clarify some of my questions. During these fellowship times, certain questions are posed for the discussion of the whole group. There is no right or wrong answer. This critical medium of communication in the Tongan society facilitates the free exchange of ideas. In particular, I use the *faikava* mode to facilitate conversations pertaining to the issue of sacrifice and sacrificial living among the Tongans in this country. The rich discussion surrounding this issue proved that this issue is close to the heart and soul of the Tongan people.

As part of this project, I have used information about the Tongan population of the TUMC from the *Kuata*, a collective body of the thirteen Tongan ministries in the Southern California region of the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Some of this information has come from their records, and from the people themselves.

Another source for this research is based on the experiences and impressions of the writer who was born and raised in Tonga, immigrated to this country and is currently serving as pastor for one of these Tongan churches. This research will be a contribution to a body of work on *kava* from a theological viewpoint.

Chapter Outlines

1. *Introduction:* This chapter introduces the reader to the problem, the importance of the problem, thesis, and how the project is designed and implemented to answer the problem.
2. *Historical Context:* I will present a brief historical context of Tonga and its traditions and culture, including a brief discussion of the history of the Methodist Missionaries and the church in Tonga and the United States of America. I will also look at the dialogue of culture and theology in the Tongan context. The issue of contextual Tongan Christianity will be evaluated in relation to the theology provided by the missionaries.
3. *Kava:* I will offer a brief history of *kava* in the Tongan culture and the church. This chapter will discuss the various traditions concerning the origin of kava and will critically look at the current use of *kava* in the Methodist Churches in Southern California.
4. *Sacrifice:* This chapter will examine the concept and practice of sacrifice within Old and New Testament contexts, and the Tongan context.
5. *Search for a Theological Methodology:* This chapter will provide my search for a theological methodology in constructive theology where the practice of *Kava* as a sacrifice provides a means for understanding God more clearly for the Tongan people. I will explore writings and approaches derived from constructive theology, multicultural studies, worship and homiletics. I will

show how *Kava* can enhance the understanding of the people from a theological perspective and function in church rituals as a tool for empowerment of Tongans and for intercultural dialogues.

6. *Toward A Constructive Theology of Sacrifice for the Community and Church*: This chapter will provide a systematic approach of the theology of sacrifice. I will explore issues surrounding the sacramental values of *kava* in the multicultural context of the United States.
7. *Summary and Conclusions*: This chapter will summarize my conclusions and evaluations, and reflect upon the project as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. The Tongan Context

This chapter sets out to provide an introduction to the context of the South Pacific islands of Tonga as well as the context in the United States that the Tongan people find themselves in. A brief history of the missionaries to this island will be considered as well.

Tonga is located near the center of the 70,000,000 square miles of the Pacific Ocean. It is the smallest island kingdom in the world. It is situated 1,100 miles northeast of New Zealand and 420 miles southeast of Fiji. The archipelago is made up of 150 islands with a total area of 269 square miles. The kingdom is divided into three main island groups, Tongatapu to the south, Ha'apai in the center, and Vava'u to the north. The current population of this island country is between 100,000 and 120,000 with about 95 per cent of who are of the Polynesian race. There are still debates on when the first settlement of Tonga took place.⁶

A. The Political Structure of the Tongan Society

The structure of the Tongan society is a hierarchical pyramid stratification with the king on top, the chiefs or nobles on the next level, the commoners on the next level and the prisoners at the bottom of this structure. Sione Latukefu indicated that long before the coming of the

⁶ Sione Latukefu, The Tongan Constitution, (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Government Printer, 1975), 1.

Wesleyan (Methodist) missionaries to Tonga, there was a highly organized socio-political system in Tonga. Tonga was unique in Polynesia and in the Pacific as a whole, in that it had a traditional monarchical system under the headship of the *Tu'i Tonga*. This was similar to the Dalai Lama of Tibet and the Mikado of Japan.⁷ The first *Tu'i Tonga*, 'Aho'eitu who began his rule in Tonga in about 950 AD was believed to be a son of *Tangaloa*, the god of the sky, and an earthly mother.⁸

The *Tu'i Tonga* continued to rule Tonga for several centuries until *Kau'ulufonua*, the king at the time, decided to set up another line of monarchs for his younger brother. The new lineage was called the *Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua*. The idea was for the *Tu'i Tonga* to remain as the sacred and revered line with all the attributes and accompanying benefits befitting a king while the new line would carry out the duties of administering the country. After several generations, the *Tu'i Ha'a Takalaua* succumbed to the same idea and a third line of kingship was established, namely, the *Tu'i Kanokupolu*. These multi lines resulted in the dilution of the power and authority of the kingship lines. By the time the missionaries arrived in Tonga, the holders of these lines were intensely involved in a power struggle to establish who was superior in the power structure. Civil wars were waged and fought and out of that struggle, George Tupou I from the *Kanokupolu* line became the King. Under his leadership, Tonga was unified, bringing all the islands under one monarchy.

⁷ Latukefu, 1

Today Tonga is ruled by a constitutional monarchy, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, a descendant of the *Tu'i Kanokupolu* line. He became king in 1967 taking the place of his mother Queen Salote Tupou III. The law making body of the government is made up of the House of Parliament and the Cabinet. The Parliament is made up of representatives of the nobles as well as the commoners or the general population of the Tongan people. This system of government is a 'look alike' of the British system. The main difference is that the king has actual power and every law has to have the signature of the king before it becomes law of the land.

Over the last decade or so, the Tongan people have been heavily influenced by a movement of some of the leaders for a 'democratic government'. The proponents of this movement believe that the kingship should become a figurehead and the Parliament and Cabinet along with an elected president or political party leader would administer the government. For the last decade the debate in the Parliament and other arenas of the society has been very lively.

B. The Social Structure of Tongan Society

Tongan society is inherently a communal society. The traditions, culture and customs of the Tongan people consistently maintain the interdependence and cooperative existence of a society that is rooted in communal living. This communal life-style is facilitated by a fluid network of reciprocal duties and obligations flowing to and from one member to the other. This reciprocal form of living is primarily the

⁸ Edward. W. Gifford, Tongan Myths and Tales, Bulletin 8, (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1924).

reason for the long survival of the Tongan traditional form of society, which has been in existence for thousands of years. And despite some seemingly obvious flaws such as the feudal classifications of society, this form of living has endured because of the reciprocal duties and obligations flowing in and out of each sector of the society. Indeed, the King and the nobles of the land reaped the benefits of the land, but in traditional Tongan living, the Kings and nobles had their particular duties and obligations that they owed to the commoners of the land.

Reciprocal duties and obligations or the Tongan concept of *fatongia*, is an affirmation of the connectedness of the Tongan society. Each member of society is verified by the existence of others; she does not exist in a vacuum. One's connectedness and relationships to others in the society define one's existence. Fundamentally, the concept of *fatongia* is based on the understanding that one owes a duty to others. This system of duty runs deep into the fiber of the Tongan society and permeates all of Tongan society. In theory and in practice, *fatongia* is actually an unwritten code of behavior for the Tongan people.

The family unit is the nucleus of the Tongan traditional social system. In its authentic Tongan form, the concept of family is understood as *kainga*, or members of an extended family that may include non-blood relations. Accountability begins from the smallest unit and grows outward to the society at large. The reciprocal obligations start from the smallest unit and grow outward, so that each member of the society knows what is expected. This way of living confirms the reality of

the Tongan person's world. It is a world in which everyone is connected to everyone else. This notion of connectedness is supported by several defining characteristics and traditional practices in the Tongan society.

The communal Tongan society is made up of units of *kainga(s)* or extended family groups. A village is made up at least one or more *kainga(s)*. But it is more than a sense of obligation that binds the *kainga* together, and in turn, binds the entire society. Rather it is the all-encompassing notion of 'ofa or love that binds the *kainga*. In the common everyday language of the Tongan people, the common phrase, *ko ofa òku ne uei kita ke fai ha foaki*, (it is love that moves one to appropriate action), speaks to the notion that it is *ōfa* facilitates the day to day living of the *kainga* system. This very important concept is accurately described in the words of Senipisi Langi Kavaliku, a native Tongan scholar:

Within the *kainga* there is a great deal of freedom and kindness [*ofa*] between members. Each member has his rights and duties to each and every other member of the *kainga*. When there is help needed by a member of the *kainga*, the geographically close members go over to help. On big occasions, members from all over Tonga go over to help. It is a duty and obligation of members to help each other just as it is their right to ask and expect help from other members.⁹

In the *kainga* circle, *faka`apa`apa/toka`i* (respect) is another defining characteristic. Like *ofa*, it is another characteristics that “moves one into appropriate action. Again, *faka`apa`apa* is more than just an emotion, but it is emotions that are solidified in actions. In a

⁹ Senipisi Langi Kavaliku, “An Analysis of ‘Ofa in Tonga Society: An Empirical Approach,” (B.A. thesis, Harvard University, 1961), 8.

funeral, for example, a non-relative person is moved to go and offer condolences in the form of money, food, or Tongan goods, to the family of one who dies in the village out of *fakaàpa`apa* or respect for that person and his/her family. This sort of respect and its counterpart of humility as they are played out in the Tongan society, once again, verify the connectedness of the Tongan person. Again, Kavaliku succinctly describes this notion:

Faka`apa`apa is more than just respect. To all observers, the outward symbols may seem to be respect but it is not all. *Faka`apa`apa* encompasses, in Tongan thought, love, humbleness, respect and more. Gifford (1929: 21) writes that the word *faka`apa`apa* has wide implications which “means among many other things to reverence, to respect, to honour.” He was right in realizing that *faka`ap`apa* has many meanings. But what he didn’t realize was that all of Tongan activities, experiences etc. were based on *`ofa*, an existence peculiar to comprehend or understand *faka`apa`apa* unless we revert to the question, what is *`ofa*. It is necessary in order to understand *faka`apa`apa* to know the most basic of all Tongan values, and that is *`ofa*.¹⁰

2. Missionaries in Tonga

The first missionaries that came from England via Australia to convert the Tongans to Christianity were members of the London Missionary Society. On April 12, 1797, Captain Wilson, of the vessel, *Duff*, landed twelve missionaries in Tonga. They were immediately cared for by one of the chiefs in Tonga at the time. Unfortunately, their work did not bear much fruit, as they did not know the language. In addition, they arrived at a time of bloody civil wars among the chiefs of Tonga for

¹⁰ Kavaliku, 14.

leadership of the islands. Several of the missionaries were killed and the rest returned to Australia and Tahiti.

On August 16, 1822 four Methodist missionaries, Rev. Walter Lawry, George Lilley- a carpenter, Charles Tindall- a blacksmith, and Macanoe-an interpreter from the Marquesas Islands, arrived in Tonga from Australia. After one year, Lawry returned to Australia due to ill health. Reverends John Thomas and John Hutchinson replaced Lawry in 1826. Although Thomas's predecessors made some inroads in promoting the Christian belief among the Tongans, Thomas has been credited for much of the success of the Methodist missionary work. Latukefu indicated that two Tahitian London Missionary Service missionaries, Hape and Davida arrived in Tonga in 1826. These Tahitians set up the first church in Nuku'alofa, now the capital of Tonga. Later, more missionaries arrived at Nuku'alofa, and took over the work started by Hape and Davida.¹¹

The success of the Methodist missionaries in Tonga stemmed from the fact that from its inception, they focused on converting the ruling classes, chiefs and kings of Tonga. The missionaries quickly learned that these ruling chiefs and kings provided protection for them so they could carry out their missionary works. The missionaries also assisted in providing European goods and advice to these chiefs. Subsequently, the relationship was a mutually beneficial one for both parties.

¹¹ Latukefu, 50.

Most notable of these conversions was in 1831; the king of the Ha'apai group, Taaufa'āhau, was baptized by the Methodist missionaries. He later became the king of all of Tonga under the name King George Tupou I after uniting the three main island groups through warfare and Christian teachings. He has been credited with the setting up of the present-day government framework and constitution for the island country as Tonga prepared to enter the 20th century. He had a lot of help from the Methodist missionaries during his 47 year reign as king of Tonga. Naturally, the Methodist Church became the state religion of Tonga as Tupou I was a member of this denomination. The church and state became one unit. Other religions came later to the islands but the Methodist church has remained the state religion to this day. Latukefu wrote of King George Tupou I,

“In the final analysis, however, the greatest credit for the successful transition to a constitutional monarchy is due to Tonga's remarkable ruler, King George, and his supporters... It was he who took initiative and though he sought the advice of the missionaries and often relied heavily upon it, it was he alone who made the final decisions.”¹²

As a Christian, King George was enthusiastic about spreading the gospel to the other islands in his kingdom. With the help of the missionaries, the training of local workers became a priority. Lay members were allowed to preach after going through training provided by the missionaries. The missionaries shared every possible position in the church with the laity. As a result, participation in the church increased tremendously. In addition, classes similar to those invented by John

¹² Latukefu, 219.

Wesley in England, became the building blocks for the new churches. The missionaries taught several Tongan leaders how to read, write and interpret the Bible. These trained Tongan natives in turn set up classes all over the kingdom. The class learning system proved to be an effective teaching tool that was used in all of the islands of Tonga. For instance, within two years of the king's conversion, almost all of the Ha'apai and Vava'u groups converted to Christianity.¹³

A. Theology of the Missionaries

The missionaries had clear objectives. Latukefu wrote that the missionaries had varied emphasis on their missions but all were set on winning these 'heathen souls' for God. As a result, their teachings and theology were based on the idea that saving the soul for life after death was more important than the events that were happening in the lives of the Tongans at the time. Subsequently, the emphasis was on conversion and doing work for the purpose of saving the soul. The Tongans accepted Christianity as a futuristic religion.

In viewing the context into which Christianity was transplanted, we can draw some clear conclusions. From a societal standpoint, most Tongans supported the idea as part of their *duty* in a stratified society where the wishes of the chiefs and kings were carried out. The chiefs and kings were already converted, and so it followed that the commoners under the leadership and authority of those chiefs and kings would be converted as well. Secondly, the life after death notion in Christianity

¹³ Latukefu, .69.

provided an extra incentive for the commoner to convert. The Tongan traditional religions indicated that once a chief died he/she would go to *Pulotu*, a Tongan version of Paradise. For the commoners, which was the majority of the population, they did not have a chance to go to *Pulotu*. The missionaries' idea of heaven being open for all was very attractive to the commoners of the land and they wanted a part of this new religion.

3. The American Context

A. The Church

This project can have various locations; however, the focus is on the United Methodist Churches in Southern California that have a Tongan language worshiping congregation. My observations and experiences within the Tongan churches of the UMC in Southern California are the context from where this theology is being developed. To discuss the theology of the Tongan churches in the United States, it is important to pay attention to the people who are members of these churches.

In the California Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church alone, there are 26 Tongan churches: 13 in Hawaii and 13 in Southern California. All of these churches are Tongan-language ministries. Some of them may have a bi-lingual ministry on their own, or as part of a shared-facility arrangement, where the Tongan congregation is sharing the facility with an Anglo congregation. The worship service of these Tongan United Methodist churches (TUMC) is a transplant of the worship services in the Free Wesleyan Churches, (Methodist Churches)

in Tonga. All of the worship resources used during service have been brought from Tonga. These include the Bible and hymnals, which are the same ones that were translated from the Greek and English languages by the missionaries with the help of a few Tongans in the early twentieth century.

The programmatic life of the church is also consistent with that of the Tongan Free Wesleyan Church. The church programs throughout the Christian year follow closely to those that were written by the leaders of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. The special Sundays that are observed in the churches are the same ones observed in the Wesleyan churches in Tonga. Like the churches in Tonga, the TUMCs have kept certain old and traditional Methodist practices alive, such as the Quarterly Meetings, which were formerly called Synods. The thirteen Tongan ministries here in Southern California make-up the *Tongan Kuata*, a body that includes all thirteen ministries. This is the body that unifies all of the Tongan churches here and facilitates some of the unique Tongan Methodist practices such as meeting once a quarter.

Likewise, the leadership within the Tongan United Methodist Churches has strong ties to the Tongan Free Wesleyan Church. All the pastors of the Tongan churches in the California Pacific Annual Conference are first generation Tongan immigrants to the United States with several of them trained and ordained in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Presently, there has yet to be a Tongan born in the United States to become a pastor serving in these churches.

The locations of most of these churches are interesting. The majority of these churches are found in the depressed parts of the cities in Southern California and Hawaii. Naturally most of the members of these churches are residents of these depressed areas as well. An interesting factor that emerged from observing these churches is that most of the members drive from quite a distance to get to their churches. However, the members of these congregations do not see the commute as a hindrance to their desire to attend church. The fact that the churches are sanctuaries as well as locations for preservation and practice of Tongan culture diminishes the inconvenience of driving regardless of the distance. For example, in the Tolutasi Pacific Islanders UMC, the closest member lives about ten minutes away with the majority of the congregation living about 20 minutes or more away from the church.

B. The Members

The TUMCs here in the United States are immigrant churches; they are made up of almost exclusively Tongan immigrants who are natives of Tonga. Various reasons prompted the Tongan's immigrations to the United States, but historically, there are two primary reasons for people's migration. Although Tonga offered an ideal life in all other aspects, it lacked two things that many felt were necessary for their future: economic security and educational opportunity. Tonga's industry is largely based on agricultural trade and some tourism. Historically, the Tongans have survived based on their subsistence lifestyle. A majority of

the population grows their food and harvests the ocean for food. The traditional Tongan life-style is not based on cash flow. The cultural practices and customs, which have been carried on for thousands of years, are based on a system of exchange of women's cultural goods (tapa, mats, etc.) and men's offering of livestock and harvested staple food. Hence, it was possible to survive in Tonga without having paid employment, which was scarce anyway. But as Tonga increasingly felt the effect of capitalism, it became necessary to look elsewhere for a source of economic livelihood. For many, this meant temporary travel to overseas countries to work and then return home to the families. But for those who had the opportunity to immigrate to New Zealand, Australia, and the most favorable of all, to the United States, it was a dream come true. They set out in search of that better economic opportunity.

Although the possibility of gaining better economic opportunity enticed many of the immigrants, many had the foresight to search for better education for their children. Opportunity for higher education in Tonga is very limited. With the exception of one local college that was started by a Tongan, there is no post-secondary schooling in Tonga. Tongans must look to overseas countries for opportunities for higher education, and those come at very high prices. And so, for many, if they are given the opportunity, they leave Tonga in order to ensure that their children will be educated beyond high school.

The members of the TUMCs are almost exclusively Tongan in ethnicity. A very small percentage of the members are of mixed race;

they are part Tongans. There is a smaller percentage that may be non-Tongans. These latter groups represent children of mixed marriages and non-Tongan spouses of members. About 90 percent of the church adult members are first generation Tongan immigrants. Historically and traditionally, the children of the adult church members are also members of the same church. This is true in the TUMCs, with few exceptions, such as when a daughter marries another Tongan person from another denomination or from another congregation. Traditionally, the wife follows the husband to his religion or congregation. In light of the fact that the children become members of the same church, there is a large 2nd generation Tongan constituency in the TUMC, with some 3rd generation members who are generally in their teens or younger.

According to the *Tongan Kuata's* records, the thirteen Tongan churches have 657 families with a combined adult membership of 2,397 and 1,693 children and youth under the age of 18.¹⁴ I have concentrated on this group for the purposes of this paper. Moreover, this sector of the Tongan American population is reflective of the wider Tongan-American population. My study of this group included passing out 936 questionnaires in my attempt to gather relevant information that would provide an accurate reading of their situations. The result of that research confirmed my worst fears about the Tongan people's lives here in the United State; the life of a Tongan immigrant is tough. Of the 621 responses that I received, over 80% of those people work in jobs that are

on the low sector of the work force, such as janitors, house cleaners, restaurant workers, warehouse workers, and laborers. Most men do landscaping or yard work, with most of them working for other people, though a few own their own small-business operation. The majority of the women interviewed are in the home-care business or “live-in” job in which they live in their employer’s house and care for the person around the clock. Over 50% percent of the people interviewed had more than one job in order to make ends meet. Less than 5% of the people who responded held a job in a professional field. Only 23% of the people interviewed owned their own home. The rest were either renting or were living with other family members.

According to the responses that I received, education was not a priority among the Tongans. In-fact, over 50% of the people indicated that either someone in their family, or someone they knew closely had dropped out of high school. Furthermore, only 2 out of 10 people went on to post-secondary school at either a community college level or four-year university. Only sixteen people had graduated from college or university in the last five years.

As mentioned above, the information that I received from the responses confirmed my own assessment about the reality of the Tongan people’s lives. It is clear that most Tongan people depend on American homeowners to provide them jobs as landscapers, gardeners, or housekeepers. Tongan men who are in the landscaping business

¹⁴ Quarterly report of the Tongan Kuata, 2004.

generally find their work by soliciting or going door to door to ask for work, a practice that is commonly referred to as *ui ui* or “call, call.” If they are fortunate enough to find and start the work, the rest rarely goes smoothly. The more common scenario is one of endless haggling and sometimes harassment, with the homeowner having the leverage of power, since the contract is almost always at his will. Moreover, for the unlicensed worker, there is almost no redress of any sort available to him.

But sometimes the culprit is not American homeowner, but in-fact another Tongan. Many Tongan men are unable to communicate in English, and they are forced to work for someone else, who is usually another Tongan person. In most of these cases, the laborer does not get adequate remuneration, and very often, he does not get paid at all. In this case, it is the Tongan person cheating another Tongan person.

The above information provides a grim impression of the lives of the Tongan immigrants in America. But there is another side that tells a different, brighter story. This part of the Tongan story of immigrants’ life cannot be measured by monetary gains and loss, but the happiness and contentment brought about by a communal life of sacrificing one’s needs and wants for the benefit of others are priceless treasures for the Tongans.

In truth, it was a challenge to do an empirical study on this notion of sacrifice in the Tongan community. The information that I needed does not easily lend itself to a quick written survey such as that

discussed earlier in this paper. Subsequently, I utilized the kava circle to gather my information regarding this issue. At this forum the subject matter is presented as a topic for discussion. Everyone present then brings forth their ideas on the topic. As an observer and participant, I had to gather the points made and record them at another time. It is awkward and somewhat disrespectful to record the discussions at the kava circle. At some kava circle, I used a tape recorder to record the discussion. Over a period of about one month, the notion of sacrifice was discussed and was the focus of continued dialogue in over twenty *fai kava* or casual kava circle groups in various locations in Southern California. Although, most of these kava circles were sponsored by one of the TUMC ministries, I visited at least three kava circles that were held independently from the church. However, it should be noted that the kava circles are open to any one who wants to join. For example, the kava circles at my home church of Tolutasi include many non-members who come from various religious backgrounds.

In order to obtain the Tongan women's perspective on the issue of sacrifice in the Tongan community, I approached the women of my home church. In addition, I visited a meeting of the combined Tongan United Methodist Women in which I posed the same questions that were discussed in the kava circles. "What do you think about the notion of living a life of sacrifice in which you share your limited resource with others?" "How do you feel about living such a life?" "Would you give up

this way of living in order to advance your own economic well-being?" I received many testimonial responses to these questions.

Ultimately, my findings on the issue of sacrifice and sacrificial living in the Tongan community confirmed my own belief and observations. The communal way of life practiced by the Tongan immigrants in Southern California is still the preferred way of life for these Tongans. The lack of economic resources and grim economic life of Tongan immigrants have not diminished this way of living. The Tongan person shares the limited resources that he or she may have with the Church, family members, non-family members, and others who may need and ask for help. This form of sharing occurs in different forms, but one of the prominent way is through the medium of, once again, the *fai kava* or kava circles. This is called a *kalapu* or a kava circle that is held for the purpose of raising funds for a particular purpose or person. In these sometimes daily events, the men come together to drink kava and to collect their meager resources and present to one who has asked for the financial help. The person asking for help may be a family member, a friend, a stranger, or a representative of an organization from Tonga. Who they are is simply not an important consideration. The simple fact is that here is a Tongan person who has asked for some financial assistance, and the Tongans here feel that it is their duty to share their financial resources, despite its meagerness.

Finally, my findings confirmed my own belief and observations that the practice of living a communal life characterized by endless sacrifices

ultimately produces a sense of well-being and prosperity to those who practice such a life. And they share what little they have. The happiness and contentment that they feel are much more rewarding and cannot be given a price tag. The contentment from this communal living is an appropriate way of living that is in line with the ways of living exemplified by Jesus Christ. It follows that the Tongans' communal life of sacrifice provides a more appropriate alternative for Tongans life than the individualistic life encouraged by the American society.

CHAPTER 3

KAVA

This chapter sets out to provide a better understanding of *Kava*. I will present the Tongan myth regarding the origin of the *Kava* then look at the different types of *kava* ceremonies in the Tongan society and their various differences and use. It is intended that this thorough discussion of *kava* will demonstrate the centrality of *kava* in the Tongan folklore, culture and tradition, socio-political arena as well as the daily experiences of the Tongan society. I hope to show how the myth of the *Kava* confirms that the practice of sacrifice is deeply rooted in the Tongan ways of life both consciously and unconsciously. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which *kava* is perceived as something greater than the practice of drinking *kava*. *Kava* as the *fonua* (land and the people) and in that sense, *kava* is representative of Tonga itself.

1. Myth and Legend of Kava'onau

The records on the origin of the *Kava* have been debated for centuries in Tonga. However, the ancient *kava* myth seems to remain consistent with little changes in the Tongan folklore and mythologies since the beginning of Tonga's existence. This myth, having been passed down for centuries, has various versions. There is no actual date regarding this myth. The following is the version used by Dr. 'Okusitino Mahina in his dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1992. One day the Tu'i Tonga, Momo, went out fishing (*hi-'atu*) with his fishermen in a *tafa'anga* canoe. It was a time of great famine. However,

having caught nothing, they were exhausted and hungry. They landed at the island of *‘Eueiki*, where they went ashore to rest and look for something to eat. Seeking shelter from the sun, *Momo* leaned against a *kape* plant (giant taro). Meanwhile his fishermen went inland to fetch some food. They did not find any food, or see anyone except a couple, *Fevanga* and *Fefafa*, with their only leprous daughter, *Kava’onau*.

Having learned of the presence of *Momo* on the island, the couple though they had nothing other than the *kape* plant, were determined in their attempt to make a presentation to the Tu’i Tonga. When they rushed down to get the plant, the couple found that the Tu’i Tonga was leaning against it, so that they could not use it since the plant had become *tapu* (taboo/sacred). Considering the constrained circumstances, the couple had no other alternative but to kill their daughter to make a presentation possible. Having killed *Kava’onau* they baked her in a *‘umu* (underground cooking oven). Learning of the incident, *Momo* had sympathy towards the couple and ordered them to leave the *‘umu* uncovered, making it their daughter’s grave. It is believed, that as time passed, two plants grew out of *Kava’onau*’s tomb, one from the head and one from the feet. One of them was a *kava* plant (*Piper methysticum*) and the other plant was a *to* (sugarcane). One day, as these plants grew bigger; a rat was seen to nibble at the *kava* plant and stagger from the effect. Afterwards it started to nibble at the sugarcane and regained its balance. *Lo’au*¹⁵ called at the island later, and the couple told him about

¹⁵ Lo’au is the name of the people who keep the order of the land in its proper place. There have been

the plants. He advised them to take the plants and present them to the Tu'i Tonga. That was how kava originated in Tonga. *Lo'au* spoke to the couple in the following archaic verse:

<i>Kava ko e kilia mei Fa'imata</i>	Kava, the leper from Fa'imata
<i>Ko e tama 'a Fevanga mo Fefafa</i>	The child of Fevanga and Fefafa
<i>Fahifahi pea mama</i>	Chopped and Chewed
<i>Ha tano'a mono anga</i>	A bowl as a container
<i>Ha pulu mono tata</i>	Some coconut fiber as strainer
<i>Ha pelu ke tau'anga</i>	A fold of a young banana
<i>Ha mu'a ke 'apa'apa</i>	Someone as a master of ceremony
<i>Ha 'eiki ke olovaha</i>	A chief to preside over the ceremony
<i>Fai'anga'o e fakataumafa...</i>	A place to conduct a ceremony ¹⁶

These archaic verses provide a summary of the components of a kava ceremony as well as how the *kava* is prepared. The last three lines of the verse reflect the original intention of the *kava* ceremony as an event which will verify the power of the Tu'i Tonga. To that end, the verse's reference to the arrangement of the *kava* circle, seen in the last three lines, can be viewed as a socio-political statement on the arrangement of the Tongan society.

The myth of *Kava'onau* has remained in the Tongan traditions and folklore for centuries without much change. But it has proven to be so much more than just a myth. This ancient tale of sacrifice has evolved to become the most central and defining ritual of all-Tongan customs and traditions. Siotame Havea could not be more correct in asserting that

debates among Tongans on how many Loaus ever existed. However, the name is still credited as the person(s) who has the knowledge of the traditions of the country. The late Queen Salote Tupou III of Tonga was also given this name by some writers for her works and dedication in preserving Tongan culture.

¹⁶ Okusitino Mahina, "The Tongan Traditional History Tala-e-Fonua: A Vernacular Ecology-Centered Historico-Cultural Concept," (Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, 1992) 123.

the myth of *Kava'onau* has produced the most venerable ceremony of all time in the history of Tonga... Tongans commonly attribute the preservation and the importance of the kava tradition in Tongan society to the *feilaulau* or sacrifice made by *Fevanga* and *Fefafa*.¹⁷

2. Types of Kava Ceremonies

The extensive use of kava in Tongan society is apparent in the many forms of traditional kava ceremonies. Historically, there are five recognized kava ceremonies ranging from informal to the very formal and sacred ceremony. I.F. Helu believed that three of these ceremonies came down from ancient times and two are modern creations.¹⁸

A. *Tau fakalokua* (a small informal gathering)

This is an informal kava party for two or three fishermen or villagers held at the end of the day. One of the wife, son or daughter of one of the men prepares the kava. Here they exchange ideas on any topic of interest in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. These self-employed men use this time to unwind from the day's labors and they determine the topics and duration of such a gathering. This is one of the most favorite activities Tonga. But modernization has changed this reality. As the islands increasingly felt the effect of capitalism and form of electronic entertainment such as television and videos become freely accessible, there are less people engaging in these small informal kava

¹⁷ Siotame Havea, 102.

¹⁸ I. F. Helu, Critical Essays: Cultural Perspectives from the South Seas, (Canberra: Australian National University Printing Services, 1999), 20.

circles. The *faka-lokoua*, as a result, is becoming more and more a thing of the past, except for the remote islands in Tonga.

B. *Faikava* ‘eva (kava party for courting)

This kava party is primarily for a young suitor to court a young woman in search of a future wife. This is the Tongan traditional method of dating. The young suitor will go to the girl’s house and ask her parents to allow the girl to mix and serve the kava for him and his friend. Once this arrangement is agreed upon, the young man will sit next to the girl in the *kava* circle. Throughout the party, the young man’s friends will do everything to advance their friend’s cause. They will support his cause by making appropriate comments, singing and telling jokes. If these two young people come to some agreement, their respective families are informed. This dating system does not always succeed as the girl may choose another man. This *kava* circle is also fading out as dance halls, nightclubs and other convenient arenas become available for young people to meet.

C. Formal kava ceremonies

(1). *Taumafa kava: (Royalty partaking of kava)*

This is the most formal of all kava ceremonies. The word *taumafa* is the term used to refer to the king’s act of eating or drinking.¹⁹ This ceremony can only occur if the king is present. The king or monarch presides over this ceremony. The king sits on the most center spot in the

¹⁹ The Tongan language, as Tongan society itself, is stratified. Three levels in the language are consistent with the social hierarchy: royal, chiefly, and commoner. The word for eating is *kai* if one is referring to a commoner, *ilo* for a chief, and *taumafa* for the King alone.

circle or the very top of the circle, directly opposite from the *tou`a* or the group mixing and preparing the kava. The chiefs and their *matapule* or ceremonial attendants occupy the two sides of the circle. The sitting assignment of the kava ceremony is a telling commentary on the socio-political make-up of the land. This is apparent in the language of the kava ceremony, *tala e fonua*, or tale of the land, which has many meanings, but in this context, it suggests that the sitting assignment inform all of the order of the land. The seating assignment in the *kava* circle reflects the power distribution in the Tongan society.²⁰ The closer one is to the king, the higher his rank is. The royal family and the chiefs strive to maintain power distinctions by arranging marriages between chiefly families. However, some of the chiefs have lost some of their status through inter-marriage to lower ranked chiefs and commoners.

While the *kava* is mixed, *fono* or food products are being introduced into the circle and distributed to the attendants of the ceremony. Throughout this protocol, the language is formal and this is the 'theater for the distribution of the land resources' according to Helu. The highest ranks get the most and it goes down the ranks of the attendants.²¹

(2). *Ilo Kava*

The same protocols and procedure of the *taumafa kava* ceremony are followed at funerals, weddings, welcoming and bidding farewell to visitors and important church functions. The only exception is that the

²⁰ Helu, 20-1.

monarchy is not present, so the highest ranked chief will be at the top of the circle. These are the traditional venues for the discussion of culture such as public protocol and etiquette, social customs, traditional values, and mythology. Here again the words *tala e fonua* or “tales/tell of the land” are relevant. The life of a society is played out in these arenas, and it is here where social standards are set and revised and revisited over time. In the words of Tonga’s self-styled scholar, Helu refers to this gathering as the ‘traditional university’ in Tonga.²²

The formal *kava* ceremonies discussed above have remained unchanged for centuries and they do not show any sign of erosion. Despite the major changes in Tonga, such as the migration to overseas country and the advances in technology, communication, and other fields, these ceremonies have remained unchanged. In-fact, these ceremonies have been held in overseas country wherever Tongans have settled.

D. *Kava fakasiasi* (Church or Sunday Kava)

This kava ceremony is a standard part of the church’s life in Tonga and here in the United States, as it had been for centuries. I.F.Helu believes that the missionaries took over the *kava* as a way of enhancing their chances of converting Tongans to Christianity.²³ *Kava* is served prior to or after any important church functions including Sunday worship service. Here the conversation is semi-formal and is geared

²¹ Helu, 23.

²² Helu, 23.

²³ Helu, 23

toward church affairs, although it does not always remain on church dialogues. Again, the participants actively join in storytelling and general commentaries; they are the tale tellers of the land or the tellers of traditions and customs of the land, as the Tongan saying *tala `o e fonua* goes. Generally, the minister or the highest ranked chief in the congregation takes the place of honor in the *kava* circle, but the seating arrangement varies from church to church. This practice is alive and well both in the churches in Tonga as well as in Tongan churches in other countries.

E. Kalapu Kava Tonga (Kava Clubs)

These are the social clubs of Tonga. In Tonga almost every village and suburb has a *kava* club or two. The clubs, which are self-started by any one or groups in the community, exist primarily to provide a place for socialization over kava. These clubs are open during every night of the week, except on Sundays. Some may charge an admission fee of a few dollars, entitling one to unlimited drinks of kava. This has led some to the belief that the *kava* clubs support the notion that money has established itself well in the one institution that is most characteristic of Tongan culture.²⁴ The atmosphere is very informal and highly charged with singing and sometimes dancing. The conversation is never serious. At these clubs, the verbal sparring in trying to outwit one another is the order of the day. At times, the conversation may get earthy and bawdy, but it is always a peaceful and entertaining atmosphere. These

gatherings usually last throughout the night and into early the morning hours.

The *kava* clubs play another critical role in the life of the Tongan village. It is the venue for traditional fund raising. Groups ranging from a school board to a girl's league basketball team may use these clubs to sponsor a traditional fundraising drive. Traditionally and historically, raising money was a function of the *kalapu kava Tonga*, or kava clubs. There were several ways of raising the money within the clubs. Sometimes, the men simply pool their money together, or they could have several groups within the clubs compete for a prize to see who could collect the most money. Another method of fundraising within these clubs involves dancing and entertainment. This form usually involves more than just the kava drinkers. The involved parties may sponsor a *tau`olunga* or Tongan dance, and the others, including the kava drinkers, will put money on the dancing girl or whoever may be doing the dance. The dancer may be one of the kava drinkers.

These clubs have modified the rigid tradition of the formal *kava* ceremonies. It is here that one finds most of the changes in protocols and methods of preparation. Traditionally, the act of pounding the kava roots into powder form was a part of the kava ceremony. Presently, the kava is processed through grinding machines that reduces it to a powder form in attempts to assure large quantity and efficiency. Traditionally, the kava powder was strained through coconut husk but it always left

²⁴ Helu, 24.

debris on the kava. A fiber from the *fau* or Polynesian hibiscus tree took the place of the coconut husk. In these present day clubs, a tangai or small semi-permeable cloth bags have replaced the strainers. Helu believes that these clubs effectively commercialize *kava* and are the most powerful symbols of the changes coming over Tonga.

In the context of the USA, the *kava* clubs and the church *kava* have the same functions. These clubs are usually located on the church property but it is open to all. Church members as well as other Tongans may attend to help in the fundraising for the church or for a group or individual who comes from Tonga or other parts of the world. The form of *kava* ceremony performed at the churches at any given time depends on the occasion that is taking place at the church. As a result, the ceremony is modified to match the demand of the specific event. This also means that the participants are expected to be flexible in their involvement in the *kava* ceremony in order to meet the needs of the society. I will elaborate on this matter later as it relates to the idea of sacrifice within the Tongan church community in the context of USA.

3. Kava as a Symbol of *Fonua* (The People, The Land)

I have tried to set forth in the preceding sections a thorough account of the practice of drinking kava and the ceremonial and practical value of that practice. In this section, I will discuss the concept of kava as a symbol in the Tongan fabric life. In this sense, kava is more than just a drink, a practice, and a social means of gathering. Kava is a principle rooted in the traditionally Tongan social characteristic of

faka`apa`apa (respect and humility) and *`ofa* (love) of people and of the land.

The term *kava* is synonymous with the word *fonua*. Literally translated, *fonua* is land or country. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the significance of the usage of *kava* as synonymous with *fonua*, I will add several possibilities of contextual interpretations of the word *fonua*. Firstly, *fonua* is a reference to the *people* that make up the land or the country and it encompasses their way of life, or civilization. Also included in this connotation of *the land* is the very core of the fabric of life in the Tongan society. It includes the mores and belief system that maintains the way of life for the society. This interpretation is reflected in another common saying in the Tongan language that refers to *kava*. The saying, *pukepuke fonua* (holding up the land) is contextually understood as referring to the practice (of *kava*) as a means of maintaining and sustaining the traditions and practices of the Tongan people which in turn ensures that the Tongan civilization will endure and prosper. Consistent with this interpretation is the fact that a lesser inclusive word exist for just the land itself. The word *kelekele* in the Tongan language is a reference to the land as an object by itself. In this sense, *kelekele* can be directly translated to soil.

Another way of interpreting *fonua* is as the source of all life. Viewed in this manner, *fonua* is the mother earth from which life itself springs from. Again, this view is supported by the fact that in Tonga the land is the most precious commodity one has. Pursuant to that, the land

is priceless and has no monetary value. Accordingly, land is not a purchasable item in Tonga. In practice, the land belongs to the *Crown*, to be distributed among his/her subjects according to, among other things, principles of inheritance. As a direct corollary to that, the Tongans believe that the land (*kelekele*) is a venomous thing. The saying *koe kelekele Tonga ko e me`a kona*, (Tongan soil/land is a poisonous thing). The belief is that when the land is not distributed according to moral and correct principles of inheritance, the people who wrongly inherit the land will suffer great evil, usually death. Over the course of Tonga's history, this belief is considered an unwritten law of the land, as it has proven accurate time and time again.

Regardless of which interpretation of *fonua* that one would confer with, it is clear that *fonua* is inherently invaluable and priceless for the Tongan people. Likewise, equating *kava* with *fonua* reflects the inestimable value of kava for the Tongan people and their way of life.

CHAPTER 4

SACRIFICE

This chapter sets out to define the concept of sacrifice by analyzing its main components. To begin with, I will offer a Biblical evaluation of the practice of sacrifice within the context of the Old Testament and the New Testament. In this Biblical study, I hope to explore the various types of sacrifices and the underlying beliefs that sustained this practice. Additionally, I will provide the Tongan perspective on sacrifice and its significance in the Tongan society. By employing the myth of *Kava* in Tonga, I will bring to the forefront how sacrifice has permeated the core of the Tongan life. Finally, I will offer a contemporary Tongan interpretation of sacrifice as a prevalent practice in the Tongan Communities of America. In this respect, I will be discussing the use of kava in the church environment as a mode of expression for the practice of this contemporary notion of sacrifice

1. Definition and Components of Sacrifice

Sacrifice comes from the Latin word *sacrificium*. *Sacer* means sacred or holy and *facere* means to make.²⁵ According to the Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, sacrifice is something of value offered as an act of worship or devotion to God, and I would add gods or deity. Siotame Havea claims that the fundamental meaning in offering a sacrifice is that:

Sacrificial rites are known throughout the history of religions, and, although they have assumed a multitude of forms and intentions the fundamental meaning is that of effecting a necessary efficacious relationship with sacred power and of establishing man and his world in the sacred order.”²⁶

Havea goes on to explain that the sacrifice is a method through which human beings search for what they believe that they need to have, and they assume they can only have from the supernatural world.²⁷

The concept of sacrifice must be perceived from a relational or interdependence perspective. The act of sacrifice is an intervening act that flows from one entity or group to another, usually one of higher power. The practice of sacrifice is critical in maintaining the integrity of this relationship. In the Christian tradition, the practice of sacrifice confirms the humanness of the one who offers the sacrifice and the need for a procedure that will have the effect of empowering the one sacrificing. Given the limited scope of this work, we find three key components of sacrifice. Firstly, the existence of the god or deity for whom the sacrifice is offered. Secondly, the person who is offering the sacrifice, and thirdly, the sacrificial product that is being offered as the sacrifice.

The measure of a successful sacrifice is dependent on the components of the sacrifice. For a sacrifice to effectively achieve its goal, the components must meet appropriate standards. Traditionally, the sacrificer had to maintain a certain standard of cleanliness, both

²⁵ Donald K. McKim, Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 1996.

²⁶ Siotame Havea, 9.

internally and externally. The Old Testament describes in Leviticus 1 through 7 and chapter 16 how Aaron or the High Priest had to first purify himself through sacrifice prior to the performance of the rituals for other persons.²⁸ In Biblical terminology, the sacrificer has to be sinless in order to carry out the sacrifices. The product to be sacrificed, whether it was an animal or the fruits, also had to attain a certain degree of cleanliness. In terms of the harvest, the sacrificial product was the cream of the crop of the first harvested goods. In the case of an animal sacrifice, the animal must have no blemish and was usually the healthiest. Failure to maintain this 'holiness' was seen as an invitation of the wrath of God on the person or community on whose behalf the sacrifice is being offered. It is noteworthy here that should the sacrifice become a cult or idol then it is equally displeasing to God. In the book of Amos for example, the prophet told the people of his time that God was not pleased with their sacrifices and sacred festivals.

I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:21-24).²⁹

2. Biblical Study of Sacrifice

Historically, sacrifice, as a practice was part of the covenantal relationship between God and His people. Helmer Ringgren, in his book

²⁷ Siotame Havea, 10.

²⁸ Leviticus 1: 7 & 16. NSRV.

²⁹ Amos 5:21-24, NSRV.

Sacrifice in the Bible proposed three main categories based on the nature of sacrifice: a) Gift offering, b) Communion sacrifice, and c) Expiation or substitution.³⁰

A *gift offering* sacrifice is a gift given in gratitude to the deity for giving one a good harvest, livestock and other resources that contribute to well being. The sacrificer recognizes that all that has been given to him/her all came from God. As a token of appreciation, the first product of his or her work is usually consecrated to a god who gave the blessing. Gift offering is also given in order to get something in return from the god. This is best expressed by the Latin formula *do ut des*, “I give in order that thou mayest give”.³¹ It is also believed that giving of gifts to the deities was a way of feeding them. There was a reciprocal relationship between a god and human beings, it the responsibility of mankind to feed the god in order for the god to bestow favors on their worshippers.

In the *communion sacrifice*, only a portion of the sacrificed product is given to the god while the sacrificer and his family eat the remaining product. In so doing, the members of the community join in the partaking of the sacrificed product thus creating a union among themselves and their god or gods.

In the *expiation or substitution* sacrifice, the sacrificial product is offered to the god to propitiate the god. In this sacrifice, the suffering of humans is viewed as god’s wrath due to the sins committed by that

³⁰ Helmer Ringgren, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, (New York: Association Press 1963), 8.

individual or a group of people. In order to get out of this pain and wrath, the one that is suffering offers an animal as a sacrifice to appease the god. The animal is offered as ransom or substitute for the sufferer. The hope is that the god will recant his/her anger and take the wrath away. Another view of this sacrifice is that the sin of the individual or the community is put on an animal, like a goat (hence, scapegoat), which is then symbolically driven away or killed. In ancient Greece, human beings were used in similar ceremonies in order to take the sins of the community away.

A. Sacrifice in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the first encounter with sacrifice is with the story of Cain and Abel. Their act of sacrifice is considered the first act of worship recorded in the Bible. It appears that these men offered gifts to God for blessing them with great harvest and numerous animals. In Genesis 4:3-5 we are told that Cain offered the fruit of the ground while Abel offered an animal sacrifice. Using Ringgren's classifications, both were presented to God as gift offerings, in gratitude for the provisions of animals as well as the fruits and great harvest of the fields. Although God's response to the brothers' sacrifices were different, it was clear from the passage that Abel and Cain were grateful for God's gifts in their lives.

Noah's act of sacrifice is recorded in Genesis 8: 20-22. At the end of the flood, Noah offered a sacrifice to God in thanksgiving for the gifts of life and protection that were granted to him and his family during that

³¹ Ringgren, 8.

great disaster. The passage indicates that it was a burnt offering in that “the Lord smelled the soothing aroma.” Because of the pleasing nature of Noah’s sacrifice, God promised not to destroy all living things as God had done in the flood. To classify Noah’s sacrifice, it is sufficient to say that it was also an example of a gift offering.

Similarly, Genesis 12: 6 and 7 refer to Abraham building an altar when he reached the oak of Moreh. Though the details are scarce, one can infer that the building of the altar is for the purpose of offering a sacrifice. Like Noah, Abram’s sacrifice was a gift offering for what God had done for him.

A detailed narrative on the rules of various sacrifices is presented in the first to seventh chapters of Leviticus as well as Leviticus chapters 14:10-32; 22: 17-30; and Numbers 18-19. The details of the sacrifices were given. These rules speak to the important role that sacrifice played in the lives of the Hebrew people. However, these passages do not provide any details on the meaning of the various types of sacrifice. The apparent omission of any discussion regarding the meaning and basis of the sacrifice is a telling fact. H. Ringgren proposes that because sacrifice was such a common practice for many generations, it had become an ingrained ritual of the community, and its existence needed no explaining. It became an accepted ritual that was widely practiced without discussing the meaning and significance of sacrifices. The practice, as part of the community’s way of life, was handed down from generation to generation; young generations performed the sacrifices as

they were supposed to do, the way that they had been done by the preceding generations.³²

On the Day of the Atonement described in Leviticus 16:6, we come across the sin offering of Aaron in order to make atonement for himself and his household. As part of the protocol, Aaron symbolically laid both of his hands on the head of the chosen goat (scapegoat or goat of removal) as if he was placing all the sins of Israel on the animal's head. Subsequently, the goat is sent into the wilderness with the sins of the Israelis. The people of Israel are considered purified or cleaned after the delivery of their sins into the wilderness by the goat. In this redemptive act, the relationship or covenant between the Israelis and God is restored. Here the sinners are moved from a stage of sinfulness to a sacred stage. Through the sacrifice, they have regained their ability to have a relationship with their God. Their sins have been atoned.

B. Sacrifice in the New Testament

The word atonement (*kippur*) is derived from the Hebrew word, *kipper* meaning to cover over by an expiatory sacrifice. Atonement is the word describing the nature of Christ's offering of himself on the cross. He offered himself as a payment for the penalty of sin while maintaining a relationship of perfect obedience to God. The four gospels described the life of Christ as a person who preached and lived a sacrificial life (self-denial) and later gave up his own life as atonement for the sins of humanity. Christ is the epitome of the concept of sacrifice.

³² Ringgren, 13.

Consequently, in the New Testament, we discuss the sacrifice of Jesus as the one time offering in our place as sinners. In fact after Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, there is no need for the Old Testament notion of offering animals to purify or as atonement for our sins.

Sacrifice in the New Testament provides us with a better understanding of the call to true discipleship. As a response to the gift of forgiveness that Jesus gave us, we are expected to 'imitate him.' Paul's assertion in Ephesians 5:1, provides the gist of our responsibility as a sacrificial people. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as fragrant aroma."³³ Mathew puts it more succinctly, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."³⁴ These are the callings for self-sacrifice on our part as Christians.

3. Sacrifice from a Tongan Perspective

This project maintains that sacrifice is the basis on which the Tongan community stands. As mentioned earlier, Tongans are inherently communal creatures. To that end, the sacrificing of self for the betterment of others is a practice that is deeply ingrained in the fabric of society. In addition, the betterment of an entity, a belief, such as the church and Christianity, is also another reason for self-sacrifice. The basic idea is that the best is saved for others, and not for oneself or one's family. And this idea is reciprocated by others, thus giving the

whole society a propensity toward living a life of sacrifice for others. The common Tongan saying *fetauhi`aki* (*fe*—mutual as in “I do it to you and you do it to me;” *tauhiaki*—caring toward each other) speaks about the mutual practice of lifting up the needs of the other person, though it may be disadvantageous to oneself. A typical child growing up in a Tongan home is not only told but she also sees that when others come to visit the home, they will have the best of everything that the home has to offer. This may include the best food, the best accessories if they are spending the night. And when that visitor leaves, he/she takes with her something of value. In addition, this idea is seen in the practice of sharing one’s basic necessities, such as food, shelter, money, with a group of extended relatives, instead of ensuring that one or one’s family has a greater share of those goods. This idea is seen in the church life as well. Rather than spending the money on what the family may need, an economically poor family will save every little penny that comes their way for the annual *misinale* (gifting of money to the church) or for a *fakaafe* (a feast prepared for the church congregation in honor of the preacher and the Word of the day). This is life in Tonga, and in other parts of the world where Tongans have settled. It is not mere theory and high aspirations, but it is the reality of how a people, who value the ideal and practice of sacrifice, lives.

The Tongan word for sacrifice, *feilaulau*, takes on the biblical meaning of an offering made to God to please or to appease. In addition,

³³ Ephesians 5:1-2, NSRV.

it is also understood as an offering to promote a pleasing relationship between humans. The term *kalusefai* is a literal translation of the term *crucify*, and connotes the biblical meaning of Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross. These two Tongan words are used interchangeably. The ultimate goal of sacrifice is to form a community. To that end, the welfare of the individual is part and parcel of the overall welfare of the community. From such a definition come the question of how much or to what degree of sacrifice are we aiming at in order to obtain community? Personally, the sacrificing of self is paramount and above all. Self-sacrifice or self-denial is the ultimate form of sacrifice that is needed in order to obtain the community that is in line with what Jesus Christ teaches.

In the Tongan society, the basic building component is the family unit. *Famili* is the Tongan translation of the English word family. However, the concept of a nuclear family, is a foreign concept for Tongans. Tongans understand the concept of family as an extended family or *kainga*. Included within this construct are the nuclear family, as well as the grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins and sometimes friends. The dynamics and structure of the *kainga* is maintained by various behaviors and actions infused with sacrifice. Each person within this *kainga* is expected to perform his/her duties or *fatongia*, (one's obligation, responsibility, duty owed to another or to God) in order to maintain a just and peaceful community.

³⁴ Matthew 16:24, NSRV.

In pre-Christian times, Tongans lived under this notion of duty to one's god(s) or society and toward each other. In the harvest seasons or harvest festivals (*inasi*), people would take the best of their crops or livestock and give them as offerings to their gods or chiefs and kings in the hope that their goodwill will remain with the family or community.

In order to maintain that "we" mentality as a practice, there has to be varied degrees of sacrifice or self-denial. A Tongan saying that is fundamental in the living arrangements of the Tongan extended family, *nofo 'a kainga*, literally means *living of the extended family*. This saying reminds the Tongan of their expected attitudes and ways of conducting oneself. By taking such a saying to heart, it reminds the Tongan persons that within the extended family, others come before self.

Along the same line, the Tongan saying "*Me`a si`i femolimoli`i*" (*si`isi`i* means small or meager and *femolimoli`i* is sharing) portrays the concept of sacrifice in the Tongan context. It means "although it is quantitatively small, everyone will have a share." The idea is that no matter how small something is, we will still share. Inherent in that sharing is a selfless act that insists that I will have a smaller share of what may be rightly my share, so that others may have a share. This form of sharing is considered by the Tongan to be a form of sacrifice or "*mo`ui feilaulau*," sacrificial living.

Another practice that reflects the concept of sacrifice is *tufa*. This practice is prevalent in the environment of the extended family as seen during the distribution of food or any goods among Tongans. The saying

is '*sio atu*' or 'looking outward' and not '*sio kita*' or 'inward looking'. The distribution or the sharing process is correctly done when the distributor looks outward to others first. The warning is not to look at your self first in which the *distributor* will end up with a greater or better share. *Siokita* or 'inward looking' is also the Tongan word for selfish.

CHAPTER 5

SEARCH FOR A THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains my journey in search of a theological methodology. The first step in this journey is to examine the existing Tongan theology. This will include a general critique of the existing theological framework, thus uncovering the inherent deficiencies that warrant the reconstruction of a new Tongan theology of sacrifice. This step will also include a look at the present situation of theological reflection within the Tongan churches as well as the Pacific region or Oceania. Secondly, I will discuss the concept of contextualization and why it is a necessary process in this project. In this juncture, I will also provide some of the existing work at contextualization in the Pacific region. Thirdly, I will discuss the sources on which my theology of sacrifice is based. As part of that discussion, I will not end with merely the source, as that will be merely a theoretical exercise. To be practical, I must provide a system of checks and accountability for this new theology. Lastly, I will provide some methods or steps for the practical practice of this new theology.

1. Critique of the Western-Tongan Theology

Naturally, the first step in the *reconstruction* of anything, be it theology or architecture, is the crucial step of critiquing the existing construction or entity. This necessary process of examination will uncover an accurate representation of the existing form. In the process,

the examiner will be able to sort out the existing material, thereby, keeping that which may be used in the new construction, and discarding that which has proven faulty and defective.

The Greek philosophy and Euro-centric theology have dominated the current theological reflections in the Pacific including Tonga. Through the work of the missionaries in Tonga, Western theology has become the supreme creed of the Tongan churches. The people of Tonga are proud of the fact that their islands have never been colonized. However, the deeply rooted western theology in the churches is evident of the impact of colonization on Tonga. The islands may have never been ruled by outsiders but the way of doing religion that the missionaries brought to Tonga has become ingrained in the fibers of the Tongan society. It is so ingrained into the very life of the Tongan church that attempts like this to contextualize theology is considered by many as something new and un-Christian.

The first point of critique is that the existing Tongan-Western Theology is disconnected from the Tongan life experience. The missionaries effectively transplanted a Western entity (Western theology) with all its uniquely Western components and placed it in Tonga. The result was a theology that was out of place. Sione 'A. Havea quoted the lament of Leslie Boseto, a Pacific Islander. Boseto complained that “western missionaries planted a western faith in a theological pod, and instead of taking out the ‘plant’ and placing it in the local soil, they kept

it in the pod and nurtured it with western environment and climate.”³⁵

The pod that Boseto complained about was the fruits and heritage of western civilization, expressed in clothing, particular hygiene, justice, education, worship style and many more. Norman Healey added this about the missionaries to the South Pacific:

They brought with them their own devotional and theological patterns such as revivalist hymns, a fairly legalistic approach to the Christian life with great emphasis on keeping the Sabbath and abstaining from alcohol...and an emphasis on preparing oneself for the world to come with which, many believed, Christianity was primarily concerned.³⁶

Notwithstanding the foreignness of that theology, the Tongans themselves have become the proponents of this theology and have effectively mimicked this Western way of thinking about and relating to God. We owe it to ourselves, to our rich heritage, and to the children who have yet to claim this heritage, to effectively wean ourselves away from this false perception, and claim our place in the universal search for a theological identity. The Tongan life experience is brimming with opportunities for appropriate theological reflection that can lead to a construction of a uniquely Tongan theology.

A second point of critique is that the Bible has become an abstract code of supreme law. In this respect, a Tongan person cannot relate directly to the Bible. Rather the Bible is seen as the remote ultimate truth. The result is that the power of the Bible to transform the lives of the Tongan people is effectively curtailed. There is no real and

³⁵ S.A.Havea, 11.

meaningful exchange and dialogue between the people about the reality of the Bible, because the Bible is seen as untouchable and superior to all life experiences. This perception is reflected in the way that the people pay the utmost respect to the Bible. Any attempt to interpret the Bible in a way that will include the context of the Tongan people is absolutely forbidden. Additionally, eating or drinking while holding the Bible is a taboo in Tongan society.

Finally, as a Tonga person, I cannot overlook the fact that Western theology was, among other things, a working tool of imperialism. As a point of critique, I must come face to face with the reality that the general gist of indoctrinating the “heathen” of the Pacific was to further the cause of imperialism. Seen in that light, it seems quite plausible that the original intention of that theology was to win the land and the people over to another earthly kingdom, and not necessarily to win their souls for the kingdom of heaven. Pursuant to that, there was no meaningful attempt to make the theology more fitting for the people. It seemed that their “conversion” was enough, because that would indicate that the converted had been subjugated.

2. Contextualization

Contextualization is offered here as the solution for the existing defects mentioned above. As proposed earlier, this work sets out to construct a theology that reflects the life experiences of the Tongan people. The first step in the process of reconstruction is

³⁶ Norman Healey, “Coconut Theology-Is there a Pacific Way for the Church?” in *The Effect of*

contextualization. The Tongan story needs to be made a part of the theology that the Tongan people proclaim. As Paul F. Knitter, “All theology is, we are told, rooted in biography.”³⁷ This is the root of contextual theology. It is the telling of one’s journey and reflecting on his/her relationship with God throughout the voyage. Jung Young Lee elaborates along the same vein when he writes:

No theology is free of personal bias. Our sociological, psychological, political, economic, ethnic or cultural backgrounds determine our personal theological orientations. Theology, like all other disciplines, including the so-called “exact sciences,” cannot dismiss the personal factor...Reality must be related to our life situations. Any theology that is not in touch with our life experience cannot be a living theology. Just as theology and praxis are inseparable, so theology is inseparable from life as it is a faith reflection on life.³⁸

A contextualized theology must be rooted in the life experience of the people. In the words of Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, “There is no abstract “Christian faith” apart from the living reality of people who are Christians, and who give expression to their faith.”³⁹ Furthermore, Eleazer S. Fernandez is instructive in this respect as he speaks about the Theology of Struggle, which is a theology that is rooted in the suffering and the struggle of the people of the Philippines:

Contextualization as I understand it.... does not mean “application,” “translation,” or “adaptation,” of some readymade theological goods from the European or North American supermarkets. Contextualization even suggests something deeper and critical than “indigenization” or “inculturation.”⁴⁰

Development on Pacific Island Culture, (London: Royal Commonwealth Society, 1984), 26.

³⁷ Paul F. Knitter, No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes towards the World Religions. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), xiii.

³⁸ Jung Young Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 2.

³⁹ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, God Christ Church (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 5.

Indeed, the task here is to create a new theological product out of the existing content of the Tongan experiences. Contextualizing is a means of validating an existing way of life, and ensuring that our theology or our way of relating to God reflects and utilizes that way of life. In Fernandez's words: "This means that the context itself shapes the perception of reality, the way theology is to be done, and the themes that may emerge."⁴¹ This concept is clearly asserted in Carlos Abesamis's words, as quoted by Fernandez in his book, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*:

The procedure is not taking a Western tree and transplanting it on African or Asian soil; rather, it is planting our own African or Asian tree and grafting on whatever is needed for its life and health. Planting requires a "bracketing" of the Western traditions when one does theological reflection, which does not mean complete exclusion. But from now on they can be treated as attempts of other people to reflect theologically from a certain context or as models.⁴²

Along the same line, Kan Baoping, speaking from his Chinese background, makes the following argument:

Theology is not just abstract theory. It should both arise out of the practice of faith and guide it. The Christian practices his or her faith within a concrete context. Since theology comes from the practice of faith, it must be interrelated with the context of faith practice. It is only because theology is interrelated with the context that it can turn and guide the practice of faith.⁴³

With contextualization, the Tongan person can further understand her faith walk.

⁴⁰ Eleazar S. Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 26.

⁴¹ Fernandez, 25.

⁴² Carlos Abesamis, "Doing Theological Reflection in a Philippine Context," in *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, ed. Douglas Elwood (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), pp.89-90 cited by Eleazar S. Fernandez in, *Toward a Theology of Struggle*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 26.

As shown above, there is an absolute need for contextualization of a Tongan theology. But there are some inherent problems that have hindered that process in Tongan and in the Pacific as a whole. Tongan theologian, Father Mikaele Paunga pointed to two of the problems inherent in developing contextual theologies in the Pacific. He incisively expresses these problems in the following paraphrased words: The first problem is that the islands of Oceania are small with poor and limited resources and they have to depend on the Western world to survive in the modern world. Paunga believes that Colonization and now globalization have brainwashed the people of these islands to believe they are helpless and hopeless on their own. They have to depend on larger and richer countries. Changing of this attitude is one of the primary tasks of contextual theology according to Paunga.⁴⁴ The second problem that Paunga sees has to do with the issue of placing Christology and Theodicy in the process of this contextualization. Paunga is concerned about the place of Jesus Christ and the Bible in the process of contextualization.

Notwithstanding the existing problems facing contextualization in the Pacific, there have been attempts at contextualization, which are worth examining.

3. Contextualization in the Pacific

⁴³Kan Baoping, "On Theological Contextualization," in Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church, ed. William R. Barr (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 87.

⁴⁴Paunga. p.3

The attempt to construct a theology of sacrifice is part of a wider struggle within the other small Pacific Islands (as well as that of the Third World Christians). Such theological undertakings seek to find theologies that are relevant to the Pacific peoples. Referring to their infant stages of development, Tongan theologian Mikaele Paunga, SM describes these ventures as “contours of contextual theologies.” Despite their infancy, it is important to summarize some of these developments.

A. A Coconut Theology

This theology was developed in the mid-eighties by the late Sione ‘Amanaki Havea, a Methodist minister from Tonga who was later the principal of the Pacific Theological College in Suva. Havea based this theology on the coconut tree. Every part of the tree was useful. The coconut tree is perhaps the most important tree in the entire Pacific region for the daily lives of the people. The leaves were used for the thatched roofs while the trunks provided the pillars for the houses. The fruit provided food and drink as well as oils for healing and massaging as well as for the lamps. The dry husks of the fruit were woven into strong ropes. All the parts of this tree can be used as firewood. Havea saw the coconut tree and its endless uses of the as a great symbol for articulating this theology.

Unfortunately, this theology did not last very long. Paunga pointed two reasons for its demise. The first was that the word ‘coconut’ was interpreted by outsiders as a demeaning term for Pacific islanders who migrated to New Zealand and other countries. “Coconut people” meant

undisciplined, uneducated, uncivilized, and unmannered. Because of its belittling connotation, this theology did not develop much further. The second reason was linked to western development. As countries became more developed, the European houses were preferred over the thatched roof houses. Anyone living in a traditional house is looked down on and considered poor. Thus, the idea of Coconut theology faded to obscurity.⁴⁵

B. The Theology of the *Maneaba*—Symbol of the Church as *Koinonia*

This theology came out of the island of the Republic of Kiribati and was developed by a Fijian Methodist minister, Jovili Meo. *Maneaba* is the central open house in the middle of the Kiribati village surrounded by other residential homes. It is the center for village meetings, meal sharing, care giving, entertainment, welcoming of visitors and more. Today, the *maneaba* is the center for community worship. By sharing their family meals, people have the chance to serve and be served. Here, the ‘worldly’ and the ‘other worldly’ meet. There is no separation of the spiritual from the secular. Those of the community that are absent are remembered through prayer and food is taken to their homes. Paunga believes ‘this is the best local image for an explanation of the mystery of the Church as a *communio*, *koinonia* and the people of God united in everything: mind, heart and body.’⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Paunga, 10.

⁴⁶ Paunga, 11.

C. A Contextual Theology of the *Vanua* or the Land

This theology was developed by Ilaitia S. Tuwere, a Methodist minister from Fiji. Tuwere believes that concepts borrowed from the land help Christians make sense of their faith in the Fijian context. He used four hermeneutical keys to express the experiences of Fijians. In part I, Tuwere used “Birth” to describe the early contact with outsiders, especially with white settlers. The Fijians rallied together to face these ‘invaders’.⁴⁷ The second part, “Face” represents the relation of land and humans, who are usually placed at the center in the making and meaning of history. Tuwere believes that *vanua*/land plays an integral part in the making of the Fijian history and has to be acknowledged.⁴⁸ The third key is “Mana” which stands for the living experiences and is considered as the center or ‘power house’ of the land. *Mana* is the spiritual element of *vanua* according to Tuwere.⁴⁹ The fourth and final part, “Ear” symbolizes the call for ‘silence’ and listening. Tuwere believes that we, as humans, do not spend sufficient time in listening in order to be addressed by another. It is through being addressed that one is led to self-discovery, self-knowledge or identity.⁵⁰ Tuwere uses all these elements in his attempt to respond to the meaning of the triune God as perceived socially, using language drawn from the historical and cultural experience of the Fijian people.

⁴⁷ Ilaitia S. Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, (Suva, Fiji: Oceania Printers Ltd., 2002), 22.

⁴⁸ Tuwere, 77-135.

⁴⁹ Tuwere, 136-170.

⁵⁰ Tuwere, 171.

D. Weavers-the Pacific Version of Feminist Theology

This theology seeks to affirm women's dignity and their contributions to the Pacific societies in all aspects. From its inception, this theology was a tool for affirming and celebrating what was already in place. It was not a borrowed version from Australia or United States, which was on some level, a search for so-called 'rights of women.' Paunga pointed out that the Weavers' program sought to emphasize not only the dignity, honour and unique contribution of women, but also highlight the partnership, complementarity and communion that exist between women and men. The concept of weaving is practiced in most Pacific islands for making mats, baskets, and so many more of the women's 'goods'. These arts are usually passed down from mother to daughter over generations. However, men plant and prepare the pandanus tree, the material for weaving, while the other members of the 'extended family' help in the process. It is a community function and process where each member, including children, play a vital role.

The struggles of the Weavers are far from over. Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, a theologian and a leader in Weavers' theology sums up some of these goals in these words. "If we are to be serious with contextual theology for the Pacific region then we need to make our traditional male-oriented, male dominated theological schools and local Churches inclusive in the true sense of the word. To be inclusive means

equality, full participation, respect for all children, young and old, women, men and all who are marginalized.”⁵¹

E. Other Theological Works in Progress

I have discussed a few of the works on theology from some of the Pacific Islands there are more theological works on the horizon. For instance, Winston Halapua, a Tongan Anglican Minister, proposes the use of *Moana* or Ocean as the basis for a theological work from the Pacific. Mikaele Paunga views *Moana* or Ocean as our creator, the ground of our being, our unifier, our life-sustainer, and our mystery—“our God!”⁵²

Other theological works developed was by the late Bishop Patelesio Finau of the Catholic Church of Tonga. In his crest of armour, he used the Frangipani flower to represent his episcopal motto, “Church as Ours—‘*Oku Ha’atautolu*’”. The late bishop used the Frangipani flower, a flower considered insignificant in the Pacific Islands to represent equal participation by all. Although the frangipani flower is ranked very low in comparison to other flowers in Tonga, everyone uses the frangipani flower. In essence the motto “Church as Ours—‘*Oku Ha’atautolu*’” means that all the members of the church are responsible for its life and welfare.⁵³

Another developing theological quest comes out of the Melanesian Islands, and in particular, Papua New Guinea. Their quest is for a

⁵¹ Keiti Ann Kanongata’a, “Why Contextual Theology?” cited by Pa’unga, 14.

⁵² Paunga, 14.

⁵³ Paunga, 16.

Melanesian Christ based on the conviction that Christ and the Gospels are not Western.⁵⁴

4. Theology of Sacrifice as Contextual Theology from the Margins

All theologies are contextual theology. Despite the claim by Western theology to be the universal theology, it is still a discussion and reflection of relationship of humans and God from a certain location at a particular time. The theology of sacrifice seeks to speak for the experience of the theologizing person or group. It is rooted within the struggles and experiences of the Tongans in their churches. To situate this theology in the Tongan context in North America it is appropriate to describe it as a theology from the margin. The Tongans live in the peripheries of all levels of the US society. As indicated in the last chapter, the majority of the Tongan population in Southern California lives in the urban parts of the cities. Sociologist has designated the word margins to something inferior, or devoid of the rich things that one person or place is expected to have. However, it is obvious that the God we interact with is a God that reaches us irrespective of our location.

5. Theology of Sacrifice's Sources for Theological Construction

To borrow from Fernandez's work, constructing a theology involves interpretation and appropriation of various sources.⁵⁵ Naming and understanding the sources are an important part of the procedure. A theology of sacrifice in the Tongan context comes out of the following sources: (1) my life experience; (2) the life experience of Tongan people in

⁵⁴ Paunga, 3

America; (3) the context that gave *birth* to these experiences; and the (4) the Scriptures.

A. A Personal Reflection: An Autobiographical Context for a Theology of Sacrifice

I am a part of a theology of sacrifice. My life experience and the way I relate to my God are innately a part of the constructive theology of sacrifice. To use Jung Young Lee's words:

[T]heology is autobiographical, but it is not an autobiography. My theology is not just a story of my life. It is the story of my faith journey in the world....Telling my story is not itself theology but a basis for theology, indeed the primary context for doing my theology.⁵⁶

The concept of sacrifice has been thoroughly ingrained in my life. I was born the eighth child in a family of eleven children. My father was the oldest son in a family of seven children. My mother was the second child in a family of seven children. Her father was a minister in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. I was born into an environment of sacrificial living. The numbers indicated above reflect my immediate family, to use the Western understanding of the word *family*. But the reality that I knew as a child was that my family included many more people. It was a community of *kainga*. Indeed at one time in my childhood, I recall having over twenty-five people in my household. They included the children belonging to my mother's sibling and my father's relatives, who had come from the outer island to live with us and attend school. Included also was both of my grandmothers who lived with us until their

⁵⁵ Fernandez, 169.

passing. My father was the only person in the home who had some sort of income from varied sources over the years. The common Tongan saying *si'isi'i femolimoli'i* or (though it is quantitatively small, we must each have a share) was the rule of our home. There was no getting around the “quantitatively small” part of life. The meager economic means of those days dictated that amount. But my parents made sure that, regardless of the small amount, *we all* shared. It was absolutely necessary that we share everything from the basic necessities, such as food, to such things as school supplies. And whatever it was we were sharing had to be stretched out even further because everyone was included, not just my siblings. We were all treated the same way.

Memories of my young childhood years provide me with many instances of sacrificial living. As a young child, I had the very fortunate experience of having two immediate families, to use the Western definition of family. An older lady who was distantly related to both of my parents had taken to the task of caring for me as an infant. Having bonded with me, she asked my parents to allow me to live with her. In that traditional way of adoption, I became a member of Ahi's family. When I was about four years old, my immediate family moved to the main island, in order to provide better educational opportunities for their children. I remained with my adopted mom Ahi, and her family, which was also made up of various members of her extended family. Life in my island of origin is even harder than life on the main island of Tongatapu.

⁵⁶ Lee, 7.

My perception of sacrifice is most vivid when I recall mealtimes with my adopted family. Food, other than the main staple grown in the island and the harvest of the sea, was very scarce at that time. I succinctly remember that during mealtime, Ahi, my adopted mom, would not eat with the rest of us. For many years, I did not appreciate the significance of this. As I matured, it dawned on me that Ahi refrained from eating not because she was not hungry, but because she wanted to ensure that I, along with the others in our home, had enough to eat. Undoubtedly, there were many nights that she must have gone to bed with an empty stomach. As I said earlier, I was born into an environment of intense sacrificial living.

In 1981 I arrived in the United States. Initially, I intended on returning to Fiji to complete my studies at the University of the South Pacific, but I remained in the United States, and later became a permanent resident. Arriving in California, I settled in San Diego with my adopted sister, Laveni, who had been in the United States since 1973. Her story is also a story of sacrifice, and to the extent that her story coincides with the story of my life, I will touch upon her story as well. Laveni had left Tonga in 1973 and traveled to San Diego, California where she married her husband who was 20 years older than she. This arranged marriage was her answer to a life of meager means, and no prospects for the future. By the time I arrived in San Diego, Laveni had helped to immigrate at least thirteen members of her *kainga*, including members of her immediate natural family and members of her adopted

family. She was instrumental in the immigration process that allowed her family members, including myself, to immigrate to the United States. She had either sponsored them to come to the United States and or provided the financial means to travel to the United States.

Furthermore, when I arrived in San Diego, over twenty people, and at times up to thirty people, were living in her home. For over twenty years, Laveni worked two full-time jobs of up to eighteen hours a day. But she was not doing it for herself or just for her husband and two children. She worked because of the great need that was a part of her everyday life. In addition to the needs of the people she was supporting here in San Diego, she was also sending money to Tonga for the support of other family members there. Sacrifice in various forms and practices had become a part of Laveni's life style.

Arriving into this environment, I too, became engrossed in this life of sacrificial living. For thirteen years, I was a member of Laveni's household in San Diego. I could have easily left and lived independently, but I felt a sense of kindred obligation to remain and do my part to lighten the load that my sister was carrying. I too contributed to living as a *kainga*, a group of extended members of the family. As a Probation Officer with the San Diego County, I could have left the *kainga* and lived a good life on my own. But I felt more in place and complete as a contributing member of the *kainga*.

Perhaps the most vivid example of sacrificial living in my own life involves my call into ministry. I had come to the United States in search

of the two-prong benefits referred to earlier in this paper: to better my education and to look for better economic prospects. By 1989, I believe, I had achieved this goal. I had graduated with a BA degree in Biochemistry from the University of California at San Diego and I had continued with a graduate study program. Along the same lines, I had established myself economically in this country. In 1999, when I decided to pursue my call to ministry, I was a Deputy Probation Officer with the San Diego County and had been with the County for fifteen years at that point. I was beginning to have the life of the so-called American dream. I was a homeowner with many signs of economic well being and security. But I felt the need to leave it all behind and pursue a life in ministry.

As a child growing up in Tonga, I understood the ministry to be a life of limited material resources, even impoverishment. *Ko e faifekau, ko e hopo ki hala `o muimui kakato kiate ia.* (Being in ministry means leaving home and walking the streets in following Him). These words seem to personify the life of a minister. She/He was to leave all behind, as the inference to walking on the street indicates, and follow Jesus. Where He would lead, she/he would follow without any concerns about her/his economic well being. In the context of Tonga, this very act was a pronounced commitment to a life of near impoverishment. The ministers left their home and their *kainga* where their welfare was basically guaranteed, and ventured into sometimes remote islands that offered no security of any sort, other than one's belief in God. As a child, I remember seeing the ministers that were called to the little island I was

born in. During times of changing appointments, I succinctly remember seeing one minister arrive on our shores. He had at least six children. They arrived on a small boat that carried them and all of their belongings, a few cardboard boxes and one pig. This was a lasting image of a Tongan minister's life of sacrifice.

As I began to feel the strong conviction that I was to leave my former life and go into the ministry, my mind retreated to my understanding of a minister's life as a life of sacrifice. This was a plausible option, in theory. But as my wife and I considered the practical effect of all this, we were in a big predicament. Do we leave the life of comfort and security that we were growing accustomed to and enter into the ministry where there were many unknowns? And what was known to us at that point is that the ministry would mean a complete new set of objectives in our life, and those were not consistent with the plans that we had for economic prosperity and well-being. In the end, after a few years of praying and trying to discern God's will for my life as well as my family, we decided to leave all that we had and follow God's call into ministry.

Entering the ministry has proven to be the most rewarding thing I have experienced in my life. At that time, I thought I was making a sacrifice in which I was giving up something of value, my security and economic prosperity, and pursuing a life of meager means. I have now come face to face with the mystery of following as one of God's disciples. In the few short years that I have devoted to the ministry, God has shown

me that what I had left behind was meager, compared to what He has in store for me. Herein lies the mystery of sacrificial living; the more one gives, the more God provides. Not only is this true in my life, but this is also the testimony of countless people who are a part of the tradition of sacrificial living.

B. The Life Experience of Tongan People in America

Sacrifice is a way of life for Tongans. As a defining characteristic of being Tongan, this way of life was effectively transplanted from Tonga when the people immigrated to the United States. The common Tongan saying “*oku Tonga e Tonga ‘i he mo’ui feilaulau*,” (“the Tongan is Tongan through living a life of sacrifice”) is illustrative of this fact. A contextual translation of this saying conveys the same central concept: “it is through living a life of sacrifice that one is identified as a true Tongan.”

The potency of this defining characteristic in the life of the Tongan person is even more apparent when we consider the transition from life in Tonga to life in America. In Tonga, the life style and the resources, albeit limited, sufficiently maintained this life of sacrifice. The concept of *si’i si’i femolimoli’i* (*si’isi’i* means small or meager and *femolimoli’i* is sharing) denotes a sharing of something of limited quantity, and this was the norm in Tonga. Everything, from food to *koloa* (goods or wealth) was shared in Tonga. A subsistence form of living supported life in Tonga. People could survive without money. Most people live their whole lives in their own home; hence there is no mortgage payment, or rental payments. People shared what they made or grew or harvested from the

ocean. In that respect, there was never a shortage; the basic necessities of life were sufficiently provided for.

Things were different for the Tongan immigrant. In their new surrounding, money was a determining factor of survival; they had to make money to stay alive in the United States. Unlike Tonga, in America, the basic necessities of life have a price tag. A common saying in Tongan circles is “*ko Amelika, mo e pila,*” or “America is equated to paying bills”. The typical Tongan person is plunged into a life of work and more work in order to make ends meet financially. But as referred to earlier in this paper, the Tongan immigrants have very low marketability in the work forces of America, and they usually belong in the lower economic sector of this country. Most family incomes are below the Federal poverty line. The norm in the Tongan household is that there is not enough money for the basic necessities of life, such as shelter, food, transportation, and medical needs.

In light of the above, it would seem logical to conclude that the Tongans in their new surroundings have, out of necessity, disposed of their Tongan way of sacrificial living, and have turned inward, working only for their personal benefit, in order to survive in this country. But nothing is further from the truth. Despite the apparent lack of sufficient economic means in this country, the Tongan people have continued to share their “quantitatively small” means. The practice of “*si’isi’i femolimoli’i*” is alive and thriving in this new surrounding. A typical Tongan person usually shares her/his limited means with many

competing causes that may include, a visiting relative or acquaintance from Tonga, a family event such as a wedding or a funeral, a family member from Tonga asking for help, a church *kavenga* or need, and a host of other causes. But rather than retreating and changing his/her life style to better fit his/her economic situation, he/she endures and life goes on as it had for centuries because he/she is a Tongan.

For the Tongans, the church *kava* clubs are the sources of financial help for the church, individual members, associates, any anyone or group who seek help. The following illustration is an example.

At the church where I have been a pastor for the past eighteen months (*Tolutasi Pacific Islanders UMC*), we have a *kalapu kava Tonga* (club) twice a week and sometimes more. The *kava* is mixed and the men will sit in the *kava* circle to talk, fellowship, sing, and relax with the understanding that we have gathered to collect some money for someone or some group who has come asking our church for financial help. Most of the time those requesting assistance come from our homeland. The spirit of sharing is alive and well in these gatherings. The *kalapu* usually starts in the evening and lasts several hours. While the drinking of *kava*, singing, talking, joking etc. are going on, the attendants toss their money to a designated collector. At most clubs, this collector is usually chosen and given the title, *Fakamaau* (Judge). He is the master of ceremony. He keeps the men informed of the reasons for donating money but also watches the language used and behavior of the attendants. Usually this person is one who is quick-witted and is respected by most of the

attendants. He is also the one who continues to encourage the attendants to donate money for the occasion. The environment is usually high in energy with conversations based on jokes and ‘mental sparing’ among the attendants. At the end of the session, the money is given to the person seeking help and a prayer usually follows.

The TUMCs maintains certain integral practices which are all manifestations of living a life of sacrifice, in which one’s welfare is sacrificed for the benefit of the body of Christ, the Church. The Misinale, (annual tithing) is viewed by some TUMC members as the ultimate *kavenga* (obligation/responsibility) of the year. In most TUMC household, everything revolves around this annual event. Prior to the event, there is an attitude of intense thriftiness so that any available fund goes into the Misinale saving. In-fact, household plans revolve around the Misinale date. For instance, one would often hear some remarks concerning getting the Misinale out of the way then we can think of doing this or that, which may require money. And the typical TUMC members consistently disregard their own needs for the benefit of the Church. Likewise, the *fakaafe* (sponsoring a church feast in honor of the preacher and the gospel) in another superceding practice in the economic life of the Tongan people.

C. The Context That Gave Rise to These Experiences

The context for the Tongan person’s experience of sacrificial living is an ancient system of selfless commitment and devotion to others. This

is the basis of the *kava* myth. But it is more than just a myth. Tonga's past and history have been passed down through oral mediums. The myth of *Kava`onua* is part of that oral tradition. The story or the myth merely reflects the reality of the Tongan people's life. For thousands of years, the people of Tonga lived a life that was rooted in sacrifice. The social and political framework of traditional Tongan society was predicated on this way of living.

The various tiers of the hierachial arrangement of Tongan society was bound together by the concept of *fatongia* or the duties and responsibilities of each person to one another or one group to the other in this relational society. In practice, *fatongia* is predicated on sacrificial living. *Fatongia* is an umbrella concept that describes a way of existence in the Tongan society. This term is simply defined as an obligation, responsibility, or duty one owes to another human or God. In the Tongan relational society, *fatongia* runs deep in the fiber of society, dictating the way people live in relation to each other.

In light of Christianity, *fatongia* has come to exemplify one's duty to God. Inevitably one's duty to God, entails duty to others. And so, a Tongan person's Christian walk is predicated on his *fatongia* to others and ultimately to God.

D. *Va'ava'a he ko e Tangata* –Relational Context of the Theology of Sacrifice

The metaphor of the tree has long been used to illustrate the multiple relationships that one has and to nurture within the Tongan

society. The Tongan saying, “*’oku va’ava’a he ko e tangata*”, literally translated as “as there are many branches to a tree so it is with a human being” denotes that each person exists in reference to others who are related to her and to each other in some way. Like the branches of the same tree, each person has a role to play in order to keep the total tree alive and healthy. The context of the theology of sacrifice is one where the harmony of the community is the overarching goal of their existence. The most visible of such context or attempts at harmonious community are the Tongan church communities in the United States of America.

Tauhi vaha’a or maintaining of relationships is what validates the Tonganess of the Tongan person. Within the Tongan society, each person is expected to keep these relationships through helping each other. The telling points come at the celebration of an event or the death of a person. The number of people that show up at these events to someone’s home speaks volumes about the dedication of that person toward keeping his/her relationships.

Because the Tongan society is made up of such a web of relationships, I find Process theological expression an appropriate tool in articulating this theology of sacrifice. The theology of sacrifice appropriately articulates the life experiences of Tongans who are in a context made up of human relationships to each other, their neighbor, environment, and God. For harmony, peace and justice to be sustained in this context, sacrifice is a way of being or the core value of the daily existence of the members of such a community. However, each

community will express their lives, experiences and relationships with God from the standpoint of their contexts. As such, the theological expressions will be diversified. It is clear however that God's actions are for the goodness of humanity and this universe.

E. Scripture

The Scripture is one of the underlying contexts for the theology of sacrifice. But the work of contextualization and reconstruction inevitably speaks to the reality that the Bible should not be viewed as an absolute, or an "instrument of domination."⁵⁷ In this respect, I echo Carlos Mesters' position that our quest is not to interpret the Bible, "but to interpret life with the help of the Bible."⁵⁸ Hence, the task is to interpret the Tongans' heritage of sacrifice using the guiding light of the Bible.

As established in Chapter 4, sacrifice is a central concept in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament connotations of atonement and offering are echoed in the New Testament, and its central message of the sacrificial lamb Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the objectives of the Scripture are consistent with the objectives of the Tongan life style of sacrificial living. The ultimate call to Christian discipleship is a call to imitate the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived and died a life of sacrifice. Sacrifice is innately a part of the Tongan person's life. However, I am not arguing here that the traditional

⁵⁷ Fernandez, 173, citing Itumeleng Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," Voices in the Third World, 10, no. 2, (June 1987) 90-109.

⁵⁸ Fernandez, 172, citing Carlos Mesters, Defenseless Flower: A New Reading of the Bible, trans. Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1989) 9.

components of Tongan life and traditions are to be equated with the Scripture. Rather, I am suggesting that the central concept of the Scripture is already an accepted concept in the life of a Tongan, and hence the Tongans are more apt to readily accept the message of the Scripture.

The late Sione 'Amanaki Havea wrote in 1986, "This Good News was already present before the missionaries came to the Pacific. In other words they did not have to bring these historical events in their suitcases! They only came to make known to us the Good News that was already here before they came!"⁵⁹ Instead of validating the Tongan's way of life and drawing the appropriate parallels to the Scripture, the missionaries effectively disregarded Tonga's context, and imposed their foreign concept of theology. Yet the materials for the construction of a life of Christian discipleship were already present in Tonga prior to their arrival.

F. Methodology for a Tongan Theology of Sacrifice

Finding the appropriate methodology for the theology of sacrifice is necessarily a part of the process of reconstruction. A theology that is devoid of methodology is merely an exercise in theoretical jabbering. The method, or the act of doing theology is critical in order to launch the theology into "being". To borrow from Fernandez's work, the method of a particular theology is "a way of living, knowing, seeing, analyzing,

⁵⁹ S. A. Havea, 12.

interpreting, and critically appropriating events, facts, and texts⁶⁰. To this end, I employ Paulo Freire's call for action based on his definition of the praxis of liberation: "to understand the situation, reflect socially and theologically on the situation, and act in ways that bring transformation."⁶¹ Out of this definition, I have extracted four methods for consideration. These are (1) studying/evaluation, (2) critical reflections and discernment, (3) dialogue and (4) actions. It should be noted that this model operates in a cyclical manner. It is a continuum where entry into the process can be done at any point depending on the need of the person or community involved.

Studying and evaluation are components of theological reflection. In this junction, we begin to ask some critical questions that will initiate the process of such theological reflection. The questions will shed light on the life experiences and how do we interpret those experiences in light of our new surroundings and our Tongan context? Whose perspectives are we using to interpret those experiences? Whose values are used in interpreting those life experiences? How has the myth and practice of Kava affect these interpretations of sacrificial living? These are some of the questions that will be posed at this level of the method of doing the proposed theology. It entails the need for the Tongan people to take inventory of their life as Tongans living in America. It calls for an honest evaluation of life.

⁶⁰ Fernandez, 182.

⁶¹ Freire, 91-92.

My paramount concern here is that this process needs to be done on the grass roots level. One of the negative effects of a hierarchical society is that information is imposed upon the masses, without allowing them to enter into a mode of studying and evaluation. Along the same line, the traditional connotations of the term *study* need to be underplayed. Rather, the process of *study* may include Tongan traditional modes of learning such as storytelling.

Critical reflection and discernment are necessary tasks for the theology of sacrifice. This vital phase in the continuum is in-fact the very core of theology: it is the actual work of theologizing. This reflection will hopefully lead the Tongan person to the understanding that life experiences are the very sources for creating a theology. But it is more than just “life experiences” that make theology. Rather, it is the meeting place or the “interfaith” of life experiences, the Gospel, the individual’s innate faith in God, and other meaningful realities that amount to theology.

Dialogue is another necessary task in this process. As stated elsewhere in this project, the Tongan people are innately communal. The processes covered above must necessarily occur on an individual basis, but it is critical that theologizing become a communal activity by means of entering into dialogue. Dialogue is a traditional Tongan form of communication. The traditional Tongan idiom *fofola e fala kae talanga e kainga* (lay out the Tongan mat so that the community may sit on it and dialogue) sets forth this central practice in the Tongan community.

Again, I propose the use of dialogue as a grass root function, in which everyone is equally situated on the same mat, and enter into mutual sharing. This will be a critical step in establishing the existence and validity of the theology of sacrifice.

Dialogue will also have the effect of marrying the method to the theology itself. Dialogue in the form of the kava circle is one of the ancient practices in Tonga. To speak about the theology of sacrifice through an understanding of the myth and practice of kava at the contemporary kava circles of today will be a validating experience in this search for methodology.

Finally, action calls for living out this theology of sacrifice. Effective living becomes a question of transformation. Ultimately, the desired objective here is that through the practice of the theology of sacrifice, Tongan people may be transformed in their living and their relationship with God. And though there is never an “end” in this process, one can only hope that the Tongan people will be empowered by this systematic way of relating to God, and thereby find the strength to truly carry their cross and follow Jesus, as prompted by Gospel. For the Tongans, it is a call to move beyond the suffering that accompanies the life of sacrifice and find enduring hope.

In this respect, I echo Lee’s contention in his “theology of marginality,” of “overcoming suffering by suffering.”⁶² It is the idea that marginal people are called to share and participate in the suffering of

Jesus, and therefore, they cannot avoid suffering. To *overcome* is to confront the suffering and struggle with it. “Overcoming suffering means coping with it, finding meaning and support through community fellowship, and believing divine presence is with us. In Jesus-Christ, the unjust suffering of marginal people is united with his suffering love and becomes creative suffering.”⁶³

Living out a life of sacrifice entails suffering. As new immigrants in this society, the Tongans have limited means and resources. A life of sacrifice demands that, though the resources are scarce, it must be shared. Sharing that which is quantitatively small has its price. But the process of *finding meaning* counters the state of suffering and changes it to growth. This has been happening in the Tongan people’s lives for centuries; it is in-fact their way of life. This fact is reflected in a typical saying in the Tongan language which I have labeled as a “home-grown” brand of theologizing about this very idea. The saying *koe kavenga `oku hange ha fakamalohisino, ko e lahi pe hono fai, ko e malohi ange ia hoto sino* is translated to “sharing one’s resources is like exercising, the more you do it, the stronger you get.” This common saying represents the deep seated belief that the Tongan people have about living a life in which one’s needs became subservient to other’s needs. Out of anguish and suffering comes strength and endurance.

Action calls for a change of paradigm in thinking and living. One of the enduring marks of imperialism is the desire by most non-Western

⁶² Lee, 158.

world to imitate the Western world. The message of capitalism and consumerism is one that tells people that they need more and better *things* for themselves and their families. And people easily get trapped into the “more you earn, the more you want,” or “the more you get, the more you want” syndrome. This message clashes with the message of a life of sacrifice, which says, “the more you give, the happier are.” The high quality of life is determined by how much one is able to do his or her part in fulfilling his or her obligations and responsibilities in a communal community rooted in a tradition of sacrifice. These responsibilities involve giving, and consistent with the tradition of reciprocity, receiving.

For too long, the Tongan people have aggressively aspired to the Western world’s standard of living and their mark of prosperity and well being. Here in America, their traditional practice of giving undermines the Western messages of individualism and capitalism. In practicing a theology of sacrifice, the Tongan people should be able to wean themselves away from the Western perception of prosperity and accept and celebrate their notion of a quality of life that is based on how much one gives away. The joy, contentment, and peace that are brought about by participating in the act of sacrifice should be valued and celebrated. In addition, the financial setback and material loss that are brought about by a life of sacrifice should be viewed as part of the temporary

⁶³ Lee, 162.

suffering due to a follower of Christ. Theologically, this is part of one's participation in the suffering of Christ, and it should be accepted.

Finally, a theology of sacrifice calls for reconciliation between the cultural practice of sacrifice and the gospel message of following Christ. For too long the Tongan people have lived two separate lives. On one hand, they have carried out their social responsibilities in a communal life of sacrifice. Quite apart from that, they have practiced their faith with fervor. The transformative power of the theology of sacrifice will allow reconciliation and merge these divergent practices. The Tongan people need to validate their sacrificial life experiences and realize that they are the very element of theology; in practicing them, they are doing theology.

CHAPTER 6

TOWARD A CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY OF SACRIFICE FOR THE TONGAN CHURCH-COMMUNITY

This chapter sets out to construct a theology of sacrifice for the Tongan church-community in the context of the United States of America. This theology will be generally stated below. A systematic analysis of this theology will be presented.

1. The Theology of Kava as a Sacrifice

The practice of kava, both informally and formally, is a form of sacrifice. It is this element of the kava practice that has maintained its centrality in the Tongan society. In the new land, this form of sacrifice, through the prevalent use of the kava circle, has undergone an intense resurgence. As mentioned earlier, in this new land, it would seem more plausible for the Tongans to lose this central theme of sacrifice in their life. But that has not occurred. As such the theology of sacrifice is based on this ideal. For the first generation of Tongans who have immigrated and settled in the United States, the sacrifice framework offers the most appropriate basis for a theology. Marjorie H. Suchocki points out that “each Christian generation expresses anew the assurance that God is for us.”⁶⁴ The Tongan people’s perception of “God is with us” is predicated on their communal practice of self-denial and sacrifice.

The American churches’ use of the kava circle as a programmatic component needs to be reinterpreted for what it is. The form of giving

⁶⁴ Marjorie H. Suchocki, God Christ Church, (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 1.

that is based on self-denial that occurs in the kava circle should be understood as the content of theology, rather than viewing it as a peripheral part of the congregation's life. The kava circle still holds its revered and timeless place in the lives of the Tongan; it is still the place for "*tala e fonua*" or for the telling or announcing the principle that binds the society together. And here in the new land, the message of the *tala e fonua* is one that is rooted in self-denial and sacrifice. It is as the Tongan idiom suggests: "*oku Tonga e Tonga ko e mo`ui feilaulau.*" Living a life of sacrifice is the defining character of the true Tongan person. Viewing the practice of kava in this light will have the effect of confirming the practice and validating it as the basis of theology.

The theology of sacrifice is a grass root practice. To be grounded is to know one's story of faith. To truly know one's story of faith is to be a part of the construction of that story that God is for us. Failure to do that will result in one mimicking someone else's story. The theology of sacrifice comes out of the experiences of common everyday Tongan people. They are the theologians in this endeavor. It is them that I seek to engage as we begin to empower the Tongan masses to allow them to be transformed as people of faith, seeking wholeness in God.

2. A Sytematic Analysis of the Standard *Loci* of the Theology of Sacrifice

In the process of developing the theology of sacrifice, several questions come to the fore. Can this theology of sacrifice be a viable Christian theology that employs the notion of sacrifice, as it's systematic

principle? How can we employ the concepts of systematic theology on this theology of sacrifice? What will this theology contribute to the varied ways of expressing one's relationship with God? Can the theology of sacrifice be a universal tool for expressing human's relations to God? In the tradition of systematic theology, the kava, as an embodiment of the theology of sacrifice, is the interpretive medium through which Doctrine of God, Christology and the Eucharist, Sin, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, and Pneumatology are systematically analyzed. Through such theologizing, the concept of sacrifice will be the systematic principle in the construction of a viable Christian theology.

A. The Doctrine of God

It is appropriate that an analysis of the *theology* of sacrifice should begin with a discussion of the doctrine of God and how it is conceived within the framework of the theology of sacrifice. In short, it is a question of whether sacrifice as embodied through kava can "represent a viable way to conceive the God-world relation."⁶⁵ Pursuant to that question, in the theology of sacrifice, God is perceived as One who is among the people. This is reflected in the kava myth. In order to gain a better understanding of the Tongan people's notion of gods, a short analysis of the role of the gods in the ancient Tongan society.

The notion of a higher power or gods was deeply ingrained in the Tongan ancient world. The orderliness of this world was very much depended on people's relations to the different gods. As mentioned

earlier in this paper, the notion of *fetauhi`aki* or the idea of a reciprocal relationship of giving and taking between people, is viewed as a defining character of the Tongan people. But this relationship was primarily patterned on the relationship between human and the gods. In the Tongan ancient world, there existed an active inter-play between gods and people. For instance, the people expected the gods to provide in the form of natural resources for an abundant harvest. On the other hand, the people had their *fatongia* or a reciprocal duty to the gods. Hence, the ancient festival of *inasi* (one's share) was a time when the people would take the very best of their harvest and offer it to the gods in thanksgiving for the favorable natural resources.

The oral history of the ancient world of Tonga is replete with the stories of the relationship between the people and the gods. The interaction between human and gods was so ingrained in the Tongan ancient society and that depth of interaction eventually led to a more concrete personification of the gods. In this manner, the Tongans moved away from an abstract understanding and perception of the gods to a solid personification of those gods, in the form of the Tongan monarchy. In this manner, the Tongan line of king is said to be direct descendents of the gods.

In the myth of the kava, we encounter the story of ordinary human relating to their gods, in the form of the king or Tu'i Tonga, a descendant of the gods. During a time of famine, this king participated in the search

⁶⁵ Philip Clayton, "Toward a Constructive Christian Theology of Emergence," 17.

for food for himself and his people. As a descendant of the gods of the *langi* or sky, the Tu'i Tonga was revered as much higher than human beings. Although he was among humans, he was considered to have divine attributes that were beyond the comprehension of mere humans. As such, when he leaned against the only food crop of the island, (*kape* plant), it became sacred. The couple was not able to go near the plant. As a result they sacrificed the only daughter they had. Their act embodies a deep sense of reverence that is characteristic of the feelings that the Tongan people have for their gods.

The notion of “God is with us” as perceived within the kava myth can be seen in different ways. On a very simplistic level, the Tu'i Tonga's very act of going into the island in search of food, is an act that is consistent with the notion of “god among us.” Traditionally, the gods were considered too sacred to be among the people. The Tu'i Tonga in the kava myth defied this norm and brought himself to be among the people.

Along the same line, the King's refusal to partake of the sacrificed Kava`onau reflects his god-like reciprocal act of protecting his subject. The human couple had done their share in offering a sacrifice of their daughter for the king's benefit. In turn, rather than devouring the sacrificed item, the king declares the *umu* (under-ground oven) as sacred. This very act of the transformation of the *kape* plant from an ordinary plant to the sacred kava and sugar can be seen as a validation of the concept of “god among us.” The “sacrednization” of this ordinary plant is

indicative of a *god who is among us* and makes that presence known by transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. This is consistent with our Christian belief that God's presence among us is verified by the transformations that occur within our lives and our communities. When God touches someone or something, that object no longer remains ordinary. Indeed, it becomes a new creation, a sacred creation of God.

With the arrival of Christianity, the Tongan's intense belief in gods easily shifted to the belief in the One Supreme God incarnate in Jesus Christ. For a people who perfected the role of service and devotion to a higher entity, their natural tendency was to transfer all that devotion to the biblical God. Today, Tonga is considered a Christian country. And thousands of years later, the reverence that was paid to the Tu'i Tonga in the kava myth is now directed to God and to his incarnated body, the Church.

The notion of God as ever present can be seen in the present day practice of sacrifice. The Tongan TUMC members' present day practice of sacrifice as manifested in the practice of the *misinale* (annual tithe), the *fakaafe* (church feast) and providing for the endless *kavenga(s)* (obligations) that come through the doors of the church, once again validates the notion that "God is with us." The Tongan people's capacity to endure these financially straining responsibilities in the face of limited financial means is a divine attribute. The Tongan people commonly attest to the fact that if it was not for God and the fact that God is with us, there is no possible way that one, who is marginalized on all levels of

society, can endure the financial, psychological, emotional, and physical strain of a life of sacrifice in this New Land.

The mystery that is ultimately a defining characteristic of God is evident in the reality that the notion of “God is with us” entails a God who is both hidden and revealed. The sacrifice in the kava legend occurred within a context of a “hidden” god, as the darkness of death overcame the couple’s daughter. But, ultimately, the belief that God is with us was personified in the transformation of the kape plant couple’s very act of sacrifice. The Tongan people’s experience of great challenge and hardship is a story where God is both hidden and revealed, but ultimately, the Tongan people *knows* a God who is *among us*.

Consistent with the reciprocal system of giving and taking in the Tongan communal setting, the notion that God is for us speaks of a relationship that is reciprocal. If God is for us, then we are for God. God is viewed as a power for love, hope and trust for humanity that pervades the community. God’s intention for humanity is to form communities that are infused by love, justice and hope. But communities are made up of individuals who maintain a relationship with God. The story of Abraham and Isaac at the hill in the land of Moriah is an apt example. Abraham acted on the voice of God telling him to sacrifice Isaac at the hill in Moriah. The journey of a father and his son to a destination where father will sacrifice son is a journey that is steep in deep sorrow. God is both revealed and hidden at the same time. Abraham knew his instructions, while Isaac did not have a clue. Isaac asked, “we have the

fire, the wood, the knife, but where is the lamb?⁶⁶ This story vividly reminds us that God is with us in our journeys. Within the Tongan communities, people endure a difficult life because of the lack of so many factors that has been discussed earlier. However, their willingness to trust in a God that will at the end show them the right directions keeps their faith and hope alive.

In the Gospels, the passion narratives bring home the truth that God is with us.⁶⁷ On the way to the Mount of the Skulls (Golgotha), Jesus faced all the worst treatments that humanity could provide. He kept his silence. Jesus continued to ask for forgiveness for “those who did not know what they were doing”. His disciples and others failed miserably to understand Him. Both the narratives of Abraham and Isaac and the Passion of Jesus Christ provide solid evidence that God dwells among us. Through the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we conclude that God is for us and He is among us.

B. Christology: Christ-Centered Identity

In light of the concept of Christology, the question is “how is Jesus Christ perceived within the theology of sacrifice?” The basic thrust of this theology is that people need to imitate Christ. Jesus’ life of self-denial and His ultimate sacrifice become the very basis for a theology of sacrifice. The theology of sacrifice calls for a renewed identity that is centered on following and imitating Jesus. Paul is instructive as he writes, “Have the mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ

⁶⁶ Genesis 22.

Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself..."⁶⁸ He was God incarnate who became human to show us the way and later gave up his life as a sacrifice for others.

Within the theology of sacrifice, all acts of sacrifices, including the small selfless deeds are considered viable. In the New Testament, there are numerous examples of Jesus doing small sacrifices. The New Testament recounts Jesus Christ's life as a person who was always with the outcasts of the society of his day. He ate meals with the tax collectors, healed the sick, uplifted the work of women, and was a friend of Gentiles. In a sense, Jesus Christ became the spokesperson for the poor, the outcasts and anyone living in the margins of society. By aligning himself with the marginalized, Jesus Christ was not welcomed by his own people and those like the Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, and Romans who dominated the society of His days. In His own words, Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."⁶⁹

Although he was with marginalized people of his day, Jesus made himself available to all people. He did not shy away from anyone. However his demand was clear, "And he who does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."⁷⁰ The *Christ* of the theology of sacrifice is one that is actively involved in the life of the community as

⁶⁷ Matt 27; Mark 15; and John 19.

⁶⁸ Phil. 2:5-7.

⁶⁹ Matt.8:20

well as the individuals. He shares meals with them, takes journeys with them and during our trials and tribulations; He is there with us.

The theology of sacrifice is Christo-praxis centric. Its aim is on imitating the life of Jesus in living out our own lives. As such, the Christians way of life is one who is willing to give up his life as a sacrifice. As Christians, the call is for us to follow Jesus Christ to the end and thereby endure the challenges that require us to make sacrifices in our lives, even as Jesus endured death on the cross, the ultimate sacrifice. Therefore, the hermeneutical principle of Christianity is grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Truly following Jesus and imitating him means that we should be intimately involved with him in all aspects of our lives as we are expected to be. The Apostle Paul is instructive here as he writes the Ephesians,” And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor... For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”⁷¹

Jesus Christ was both human and divine. He continuously drew a picture of an intimate relationship between Him and His unknowable Father to make this point. In John 1:18 Jesus is referred to as ‘the only begotten God [Jesus] who is in the bosom of the Father has explained him.” Later in the Gospel of John, Phillip asked Jesus to show him the Father. Jesus replied, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Asserting that He was both Son and Father, Jesus in the Gospel

⁷⁰ Matt.10:38

of Luke 19:22 (and Matt.11: 27) states, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” In His sacrifice and resurrection, Jesus Christ shows Christians that because we are part of Him, we can be ‘of this world but not of this world.’ He shows us that by following Jesus Christ, we are in a community with Christ himself. Ultimately, when we give ourselves up as sacrifices, we are indeed expressing the life in this world but connected to the divine through an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ was a contextual divine being. He used the elements of his surrounding to enhance the point that he was both human and divine. He said, “I am the Bread of Life that came down from heaven”.⁷² Jesus tried to make the point that the life of his followers should be a life of sacrifice. In addition, the connection of people to the context enhances their knowledge and understanding of Christians. By employing the elements of culture, Jesus showed the people of his time how limited humanity can be and are definitely in need of a divine community or relation with God. Sacrifice gives humanity the building blocks for a community as seen in a Christian church.

(1) The Eucharist and the Kava

The practice of kava as borne out of the story of *Kava'onau* can be used as a contextual tool for a more intimate understanding of the

⁷¹ Ephesians 5:2 & 30.

Eucharist. In short, the Eucharist is a service of remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for the world, in that he died for the sin of the world. Without taking away from the value of this practice, I believe that the concept of humanity partaking the flesh and blood of Christ, as signified in the Eucharist, is an illusive notion for many believers. For the Tongan believer, the very gist of the kava myth is the act of sacrifice in which one's life was slain for the another's wellbeing, to satisfy the hunger of the king. The kava plant, which is the incarnated body of the leper girl, becomes the sacred object that is broken and given to all. The Tongan person readily accepts the notion of the sacrifice of the leper girl victim and verifies its validity by fully participating and believing in the practice of kava. Without detracting from the primacy of the Eucharist service, I propose here that the Tongan person is more able to accept the Eucharist as a coherent faith practice because of her contextual understanding of *kava* and the underlying story of sacrifice.

Kava as a symbolism for the land (people and civilization) as in the notion of kava as *fonua* lends itself to another possible interpretation of kava as it relates to the Eucharist. As mentioned earlier, kava is synonymous with *fonua* the all-encompassing Tongan word for land and the people and their civilization. On one level, *fonua* is the earth itself and is the very source of life. Pursuant to the concept of kava as *fonua*, the *fonua* itself is broken for the benefit of all. As Eucharist is a ritual of remembering the breaking of Christ's body, the *fonua*/kava is broken

⁷² John 6:35, NSRV.

and given for all, and the ritual of kava exist today to memorialize this secular act.

Another variation of the breaking of the *fonua*/kava is that very source of life is broken and given for all to partake of, and when one drinks the kava, one is partaking of that vital source of life. On a symbolic level, the breaking of the *fonua* is the sharing of wisdom and knowledge that goes on in the kava circles. Additionally, the breaking of the *fonua*, is the sharing of one's personal resource, as in money, that occurs at the kava circle.

Another parallel between the two rituals is the value in the repetitive pattern of the ritual. At the Last Supper, Christ tells his disciple "do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." The Eucharist has become the central and defining ritual for Christianity. Likewise, the Kava ritual is in itself a remembrance service of the Kava`onau sacrifice. Kava has become the most central and definitive of all Tongan rituals.

C. The Concept of Sin within a Web of Relations

How is the concept of sin perceived within the framework of the theology of sacrifice, as manifested in the kava myth and the practice of sacrifice? For the purpose of this project, sin is defined as a separation from God. In a perfect world, order is achieved through the maintenance of a relationship with God. Suchocki's keen perception about relationship is instructive on this dynamic of sin. She writes, "The inescapability of relationships means that the avenues of enrichment

may become avenues of destruction.”⁷³ The proper maintenance of one’s relationship with God will result in enrichment. On the other hand, the abandonment of a relationship is destruction or sin itself.

In the kava myth, the sacrifice of Kava`onau was the couple’s attempt to maintain a working relationship between themselves and their god, as personified through the Tu`i Tonga. This attempt to honor the god is consistent with the Tongan traditional notion of life as maintaining a system of inter-related relationships. This act of offering their daughter to the king can be viewed as, in Suchocki’s word, an “avenue of enrichment.” It is the couple’s attempt to find good fortune from the god.

Likewise, the present day practice of sacrificial living within the Tongan community is inherently an attempt to maintain and sustain existing relationships. In the Tongan web of inter-related connections, a person easily sacrifices his/her comfort and basic necessities for the benefit of the others within the web. The Tongan person understands that relationships must be maintained and sustained if they are to be “avenues of enrichment.” Alternatively, if relationships are not appropriately maintained, they will prove to be “avenues of destruction.”

Suchocki further elaborate sin as a distorted relationship. She writes about sin as “the Lie” or the distortion of what is really there. She argues that sin is when we lock ourselves from true well being. In her words, she writes,

⁷³ Marjorie H. Suchocki, God Christ Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 15.

The paradox is that while we ourselves built the prison, we build it with our own existence. Therefore, we do not have the strength to break the prison down, and we are trapped by and in sin. Release must come from beyond ourselves in a counterforce to sin. We require a force in the past strong enough to counter the demonic, a force in the future that is stronger than death, and a force in the present that can enable us to live *in the full interchange of relational existence*.⁷⁴(my italics)

The force that Suchocki is talking about here is God. The theology of sacrifice sees God as the power that can breakdown the wall of the prison of sins that we have built. In order for humanity to operate in a communal way of sacrificial living, they must maintain a relationship with God who is with them. And out of that most fundamental relationship, will come the strength and the grace for one to be able to maintain all other relationships within the web of connections. Obviously, the choices we make determine the type of life we have. When we allow ourselves to participate in things that set us apart from God, we engulf ourselves in sin thereby distort our view of God which is reality.

D. Ecclesiology

How is the church conceived within the framework of the theology of sacrifice? I have referred to the dual roles of the Tongan churches in the United States as places of worship as well as centers for cultural preservations and practice. In the context of the theology of sacrifice, these dynamic roles of the church are vital to the survival of the community of believers and for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. In particular, the Tongan notion of sacrifice is thoroughly played out within the setting of the Tongan church.

⁷⁴ Suchocki, 27.

The practice that validates our faith journey needs to reflect this theology of sacrifice. We need to move away from the rigid practices that characterize our worship. Worship should be understood as a fluid activity that can be practiced in other arenas of the Tongan life and not just in the church building. The practices of sacrificial giving that are rampant in the Tongan community of faith, such as the *fakaafe* (feasting), *kalapu kava Tonga* (kava events that is for the purpose of giving), and *kavenga* or *fatongia* (an event necessitating some form of giving) should be viewed as a way of relating to God. Indeed, this is love and faith set in action. There needs to be a change of paradigm in which Tongans begin to reinterpret their practices of sacrificial giving as a form of worship or relating to God. God does not dwell in some remote distance. He dwells among us as Christ incarnated. As an avid practitioner of sacrificial giving, I can attest to the fact that I feel closer to God as I participate in the act of self-denial and giving.

The church events that entail the practice of giving are telling examples of “God dwelling among us.” One such event is the annual *Misinale* (an annual event that is set apart for the giving of one’s tithes and offering to God). *Misinale* is the literal translation of “missionary.” The use of the word suggests the dominant role missionaries had in the life of the early Tongan church. *Tuku mo`ui* or giving of one’s life is another reference to this annual day of gift giving. This term is more reflective of the concept of sacrificial giving that characterizes Tonga life. The overwhelming spirit at these occasions is one of utter joy and great

rejoicing. The women of the church dance and sing during the gift giving. There is usually a lighthearted sense of competitiveness, between the various groups or individual, on who will give the most money to the church. The practice of giving based on a notion of self-denial is played out in an atmosphere of great joy and happiness. The joy and love that is portrayed through singing, dancing, laughing, and crying, are components of the theology of sacrifice.

Being in this transformed stage, Tongans are then empowered as a church community to open themselves up for the work of God. The church is a part of all humanity. It is made of individuals who have Jesus Christ as their example. As a corporate entity, the church continues to face new challenges and changes. In such changing contexts, the church has to mirror the life of the one who continued to empty himself and said, “not my will, but Your will be done.”

E. Pneumatology

In light of the concept of pneumatology, the query is how is the Holy Spirit conceived within the framework of the theology of sacrifice? The Spirit ministers to a people whose life experiences are deeply steeped in the practice of sacrifice. The great inner struggles and pains that such a life entails, requires the healing touch of the Holy Spirit. Without the ever-present touch of the Spirit, a life of sacrifice would not be possible.

The spirit world is a central component of life in the Tongan society. Stemming from oral traditions that have numerous references to the gods and spirits, the Tongans have readily accepted the existence of

the Holy Spirit as the one that precedes the creation and all other spirits. As such, the Spirit has continued to remain as being an active participant in the creation story. It has continued to be the power that has infused the lives of the Tongan people of today.

F. Eschatology

The issue of the end of time is a point of debate and mystery from the standpoint of the theology of sacrifice. The proponents of this theology are in a process. The beginning (as in Genesis) and ending (as in Revelation 21 & 22) of the world as described in the Bible are clear. These processes are in the hands of God. As for finite humans to define the end of times, this theology finds it mysterious. The questions that are raised are; Did God create this world just to eventually destroy with so much fiery elements at the end?

The theology of sacrifice understands that God is the source of creation and the created universe will have be more intimate relationships with the nature of God. As such, this theology proposes a life of continuous sacrifice, or continuous emptying of self as Jesus did in order to give life to others. The sacrifice by Jesus points to an eschatology that ends with resurrection. As this theology is Christocentric, eschatology remains in the hands of God. The Christians task is to follow Jesus. It is through this living and dying in Christ that the hope of an end of the world remains.

The practice of kava, both informally and formally, is a form of connection with the spiritual worlds. It is this element of the kava

practice that has maintained its centrality in the Tongan society. In the new land, this form of sacrifice through the prevalent use of the kava circle has undergone an intense resurgence. As mentioned earlier, in this new land, it would seem more plausible for the Tongans to loose this central theme of sacrifice in their life. But that has not occurred.

3. Theology of Kava As A Sacrifice: A Critique

Kava as a practice is not above meaningful critique. Perhaps the old saying that “too much of anything good is not good” is appropriate here. The practice of drinking kava and of the gifting that goes on during the kava circle can be too much at times. As a result, other problems will arise in the family setting, and in the community. In response to this apparent problem, I propose that the method of dialogue be used to project more understanding about this problem. If the participants can appropriately contextualize the practice of *kava*, they are apt to recognize it as part of a balanced life that seeks wholeness in God. Seeking the appropriate balance should be a critical part of this methodology.

Another point of critique has to do with the issue of the kava as being a male's domain. To put things in context, Tongan society is intensely bifurcated between the sexes. This is a challenge for the theology of sacrifice as personified through the use of kava. To be sure, the system of giving and sharing that is prevalent in the kava practice is not a uniquely male domain; rather it is often time a family activity that is done with and for the benefit of the family. The reciprocal nature of the Tongan family is true in this aspect of the Tongan life as well.

Although generally, the kava circle is made up of only men, it is usually the women in the family that does the allocation of the money and then the men will come and gift it at the kava circle. In addition, the idea behind this sacrificial form of giving is that it is an investment for the future well being of the giver and his family. The end result of this investment can be seen in various ways. On a more immediate level, the giver instantly feels the inherent joy that giving prompts within one who practices sacrificial giving. And as mentioned earlier in this project, when one practices sacrificial giving, he/she endures the hardship that accompanies such a life style. But endurance breeds strength, and that could be seen as a reward for giving, in and of itself. In terms of a future reward for giving, the giver instinctively knows that there will come a time when he/she will be on the receiving end. Finally, the notion is that the sacrifice will ensure some form of well being for the future of the family through the good will of others in the society and most importantly, through the grace of God. In that sense, all the family members, including the women, share in the kava practice.

The call for sacrificial living may be viewed in other context, such as feminist theology and third world countries as disempowering and problematic. In feminist theology, the call for women to further engage in a sacrificial life may be viewed as self-destructive. In most parts of the world, women have, traditionally, been the ones to endure a life of sacrifice. In those instances, sacrifice is viewed as a destructive force within the life of women. This instant work of contextualization is

necessary to counter this point of critique. It is the reciprocal framework of sacrifice that ensures that no one will be victimized, because one will have the opportunity to be on both end, the giving and receiving ends.

Likewise, people in third world country have traditionally lived a life of self-denial and sacrifice. Once again, pursuant to this point of critique, a life of sacrifice could easily be seen as a life of victimization. This theology of sacrifice may be seen as an act of disempowerment in which the practitioner is called into more and more sacrifice. In response to this, the critical need for a change of paradigm is seen in this respect. The new standard should reflect the inner values of happiness, emotional gratification, love and contentment. Ultimately, the call for a theology of sacrifice may be a call to impoverishment, but it is in no uncertain term a call for growth and empowerment of the people.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The theology of sacrifice is not an end to itself. Theologizing is never complete, as the act of living never comes to a complete stop. The life experiences of everyday living provide the very building blocks for effective theology. In the foregoing pages I have attempted to provide some of those building blocks within their appropriate context. In providing the context I hope to provide the framework for a better understanding of one's faith walk. The aim of this work on contextual theology is, in short, to facilitate a better understanding of God and how the Tongan person relates to God. This work is but just a means for a more meaningful fellowship with God, in which the contexts of the Tongan person's life are to be celebrated and become the very sources for a construction of a theology which validates the Tongan person's life experiences. At best, it seeks the transformation of the Tongan person living in the United States to be able to find abundant life within the context of being a Tongan person living in a foreign land.

Notwithstanding the aims set forth above, I remind myself at every juncture of this project that God is so much more than context. God transcends all the contextual making of myself as a Tongan, and as a Tongan living in the United States. God's truth is universal and permeates every culture, tradition, and context. But in my journey of faith, it is precisely these concepts of transcendence and the grace of God that gives me hope and lasting endurance in this race called life. I am

fully aware that regardless of the context and situation, God reaches me where I am.

To end, this project is, to use the word of a Pacific theologian, a “contour” of contextualization of theology. But the task is far from over and I intend to continue this process of meaning-making for my fellow Tongans, in hope that it will provide true transformation in their lives.

In closing these words from the pen of Orlando Costos accurately portray my hope for a theology of sacrifice growing out of the context of Tongans:

It is a question of whether or not theology can articulate the faith in a way that is not only intellectually sound but spiritually energizing and, therefore, capable of leading the people of the people of God to be transformed in their way of life and to commit themselves to God’s mission in the world.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Orlando Costas, “Evangelical Theology in the Two Thirds World,” TSE Bulletin 9, no. 1, (Sept.-Oct. 1985): 7-13.

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by problems of economic hardships, cultural conflicts and clash, feelings of displacement and inferiority, and an intense longing for the comfort and security of the home land. Tongans, much like other immigrants, have taken to the Church in search of a place of refuge, in addition to living out their faith. In this respect, the Church plays a critical role in appeasing the intense fear and instability that Tongan immigrants feel in their new surrounding. But the Church is ill-prepared for this role, because the current theology fails to truly reflect the life and living of the Tongan people. Herein lies the great need for the Church to articulate a new theology for the Tongan people, a theology that will appropriately and accurately embody the life of the Tongan people and how they relate to God within that context.

In attempting to construct a contextual theology for the Tongan people, it is clearly apparent that amidst this life of hardship, there is a distinct characteristic that defines the lives of the Tongan people, a life of sacrifice. The central tradition of the Kava is based on this distinct characteristic of sacrifice. The Tongan saying "*Oku Tonga e Tonga i he mo'ui feilaulau*," (the Tongan is (definitively) Tongan through living a life of sacrifice), clearly illustrates how central the practice of sacrificial living is in the life of the Tongan people. The ideal and practice of sacrifice is heavily intertwined into the mores of the Tongan society. The myth and story of the Kava plant is a classic example of the defining character of the ideal and practice of sacrifice within the Tongan society. Here in the

¹ Sione Latukefu, *Church and State in Tonga* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), 41.

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